

Iain Macritchie: The Prayer of Jabez

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Preacher: Guest Preacher

[0 : 00] Now if we could turn back to God's word together as we find it in the Old Testament in 1 Chronicles chapter 4 and I'd like us to take for our text this evening just some of the words that we find in verse 10 but we'll read verses 9 and 10 together.

Jabus was more honourable than his brothers and his mother called his name Jabus saying because I bore him in pain.

Jabus called upon the God of Israel saying, O that you would bless me and enlarge my border and that your hand might be with me and that you might help keep me from harm so that it might not bring me pain.

And God granted what he had asked. Now I wonder if how many of us here tonight if we came across this chapter Chronicles 4 in our daily devotions or in family worship, how many of us would actually for being honest read through the whole chapter?

How many of you would say to yourself, I really want to read Chronicles chapter 4 today? The fact is that 1 Chronicles chapters 1, 2 and 3 are basically a list of genealogy, lists and lists and lists of names and I think it's safe to say that if we came to these chapters we would perhaps skip over them thinking that there's not really anything to be found here that's going to edify us, nothing that's going to really feed our souls.

[2 : 02] I think though that by doing this and I think we're probably all guilty of having done that in worship skipping parts of the Bible we can miss out on two nuggets of gold.

We can miss out on precious text of scripture that can be in the middle of a long list of names that could so easily be missed where we want to read that chapter.

You know the text that we have before us tonight is no exception. As many of you might know I'm studying in Edinburgh, I've just finished my first year training for the ministry at Edinburgh Theological Seminary.

Although it took me a little while to settle in the city I have to say that I'm really enjoying living in Edinburgh and getting to know it a bit better.

It's a great city for walking and often on a Friday after class myself and a couple of the boys in my class what we'll do is we'll go off on foot and we'll explore new parts of the city.

[3 : 16] There's lots of interesting things in Edinburgh if you've never been there before, lots of new nooks and crannies that we're constantly discovering.

The one thing I notice in Edinburgh is that around nearly every single corner you see a church.

This is a city that is filled with churches. Some of these churches are sadly no longer used as churches, they're perhaps being used as restaurants or not used for anything at all but there are plenty churches that are still being used as a place of worship.

What I've noticed on quite a lot of these churches is on the railings outside a banner attached to the railings just like you often see at Laxdale School when you drive past advertising a soup and pudding lunch at a bonfire night, a banner like this with just two words.

Two simple words. Try praying. Try praying.

[4 : 32] You know tonight friends here nestled in the middle of this chapter full of names we find a man called Jabus who tried praying.

Jabus called upon the Lord, I'll read the verse again saying, oh that you would bless me and enlarge my border, that your right hand might be with me and that you would keep me from harm so that it might not bring me pain and God granted what he had asked.

For a short time this evening then I'd like us together to look, note at the whole prayer, there's quite a lot in this prayer, but just to look at the first part of the prayer, oh that you would bless me and enlarge my border, oh that you would bless me and enlarge my border.

I'd like us to look at these words together, I'd like us to see what they mean and importantly to see how they apply to us in our lives.

We see then that this prayer was prayed by a man called Jabus. Now the only account that we have of Jabus is to be found here in this chapter in verses 9 and 10.

[5 : 55] We do read elsewhere in chronicles of a place by the name of Jabus, some commentators suggest that perhaps this place was named after this man but we can't be sure of this.

Now unlike Zacchaeus who we looked at together this morning, Jabus was not blessed with such a good name, you remember Zacchaeus' name meant righteousness but Jabus' name comes from the same root as the words pain or sorrow.

And he was called this because as we read in verse 9 his mother bore him in pain. Now this is no different from any other mother bearing a child in pain and so some would suggest that Jabus had this name not just because his mother bore him in pain but because of some emotional or circumstantial pain that was his, a pain that perhaps followed him through his life and led him to make this prayer to God.

Of course this is speculation. Now the words that introduce us to Jabus in verse 9 tell us that he was an honourable man, that he was more honourable than his brothers.

And this word honourable it can be translated as cabod which means to be heavy. Now of course we know that this is not somehow relating to the weight of Jabus but this word is rather used figuratively to describe a man who was bursting with integrity, with humility, a man who could be trusted.

[7 : 52] Jabus is an honourable man but evidently from what we have before us we can see that he's also a praying man.

Now surely the fact that this is all that we know about Jabus, that he's an honourable man, that he's a praying man, surely this is an example to us tonight that we too would be known as men and women of honour and of prayer.

That in many ways our defining feature would be the fact that we walk prayerfully and humbly before God. But how can we make this happen?

Well I think the clues can be found in the words that we have before us. Firstly we notice that Jabus is to be commended for coming before the God of Israel at all.

You see this was in complete contrast to so many in his day who had abandoned the God of Israel and had rather began worshiping idols, worshiping false gods, gods that were stirred up and made from the human imagination.

[9 : 12] Now to you and to me we might think of false gods as carved images out of wood or stone or bronze and I'm sure that perhaps in the context here that is exactly what they were.

I'm sure that 100% sure in fact that there's nobody here that bows down before the false gods, that nobody here would say that they worship false idols, that they are like Jabus, that they come and they worship the Holy God of Israel.

But you know idol worship goes on today even in Carlyway, even in your own heart.

You know an idol doesn't have to be something that has been carved out of wood or stone because what an idol actually is, is anything, absolutely anything that we put before God.

They can be legitimate good things, our job, our family, our possessions, our pastimes, good things but things that so subtly without us even realising it take a higher place in our lives than God.

[10 : 42] Now why am I saying this? Well you're here tonight to worship the God that Jabus sought to worship, the same God.

But as you do so, do you, do I, do we have any idols in our hearts? Maybe as you sit here you're thinking about what it is you're going to do tomorrow.

You're putting your plans before listening to the word of God. We've all been there. Perhaps you're thinking of that wonderful holiday that you've got planned in three weeks time.

You're looking forward to it and it's good to look forward to it but it's taking up your mind just now instead of focusing on worshipping God.

Can you see how we can also subtly, you and me, have these idols in our hearts? I remember hearing about a man once who in the Sermon had in his mind taken apart a whole massy 35 extractor and put it back together.

[12 : 00] He wasn't thinking about the word of God but he was idolising something that to him was no doubt legit.

You know, there's nothing wrong with planning our future or looking forward to our next holiday or even working on our track that all these things are surely blessings from the Lord.

But the point is that we can allow these things even as Christians to distract. And so often, I don't know if you've found this, but so often the very act of us coming to God in the morning or in the evening seeking to pray to our Heavenly Father can be suffocated by these subtle demands, these subtle idols that we have in our lives.

But Jabez called upon the Lord. Now notice here, there's a confidence, there's a purpose and there's a clarity in these words.

You get the sense that Jabez is truly focused on what he's doing and the word called has a sense of urgency in it. When you call someone, you're wanting an answer straight away.

[13:20] It doesn't say that he asked the Lord or he said to the Lord, but rather he called. Now at a first glance, you would be forgiven for thinking that perhaps Jabez's words are selfish and arrogant, that his prayer was only for his own gain.

Oh, that you would bless me and enlarge my border. That's almost the same as you praying to the Lord to bless you by giving you all the crofts that surround your house.

Now that would sound like an absurd selfish prayer. But you know, Jabez's prayer to be blessed, to have his borders enlarged, to be given more land.

It's not rooted in greed or a materialistic spirit, but rather it's rooted in a real strong desire in his heart to see the promises of God fulfilled.

Let me explain. Here we find Jabez petitioning the one who had previously entered into a covenant, into a promise with Abraham and promised him and the Israelites, the land of Canaan for a possession.

[14:51] You can read about that in Genesis 12. And so quite a lot throughout the Old Testament, you see God's promise to his people is often linked with land, that he promises to give the people a land.

Another example of this can be found years before Jabez was born in Joshua 1. Moses, my servant, is dead. Now therefore I rise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people into the land that I am giving them, to the people of Israel.

See place that the soul of your foot will tread upon I have given to you just as I had promised Moses.

God had made a promise, a covenant to his people. You might remember the story. God's people had at first set out so enthusiastically, so full of vigor and zeal with that desire and their heart to gain possession of the land.

But after a while they became discouraged. They started to mourn and they slackened in their commitment.

[16:15] And as time went on they then began living among the Canaanites and Amorites and a decade later it was necessary for Joshua to remind the Israelites, they needed reminding, to them that there remains much land to be possessed.

I wonder if we can identify with that starting off in our Christian life, so full of the joy of the Lord, so desirous to share our faith with others.

But then as time has gone on we've perhaps become discouraged and we've taken our eye off Christ and we've maybe slackened in our commitment.

I'm sure we've all been there at some point. But despite all God's warnings his people not only found themselves amongst the Canaanites and Amorites but they began worshiping.

This is God's people, they had begun worshiping pagan gods so that by the time Jabez was born those who remained true to the Lord were of a tiny minority.

[17:37] But all these years later Jabez knew of the promise. He knew that God had promised his people a land, no doubt he would have been taught by his mother or by people in his village of God's promise to his people and instead of disregarding it as some sort of mythical story he took it to heart.

He acted upon it and in doing so he came to know the God of Israel for himself in the same way that God answered the prayers of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Aaron and Joshua.

So too did Jabez know that the Lord would answer the prayers of even one of the least of his followers. What an encouragement that is to us tonight.

I'm sure that many of us here have been taught God's promises from a very early age perhaps by our grandparents or by an old aunt or an old uncle or minister or a sabbath school teacher and in being given these promises haven't you been given something precious, something precious that has been handed down to you?

We wouldn't fall into the spirit of the Israelites who disregarded the promises in favor of living for the false promises of this world.

[19 : 19] Rather than holding on to the promises of God for that inheritance they rather held on to the promises of a world that all too often cannot keep its promises.

That is the wonder of the God of Israel. He doesn't break his covenant. He doesn't break his promises.

It was the Puritan Thomas Brooks who said that many, sorry, men many times will eat their words, will regret what they promised you, but God will never eat his words.

He will never regret what he said or go back on his word. And so Jabez's cry to God, it wasn't born out of a selfish ambition or greed, but rather it was founded on a confidence in a covenant keeping God.

At the end of the day all Jabez was praying for was what God had promised to give him already.

[20 : 36] Last week I mentioned the shorter Catechism and I make new apologies for doing so again. This wonderful little book of theological questions and answers.

Question 98 asks what is prayer? Prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God for things agreeable to his will in the name of Christ with confession of sins and thankful acknowledgement of his mercies.

Things agreeable to his will. What exactly does that mean to us? Well basically this means us praying to God for things that he's already promised us in his word.

Things that he says to us so clearly that he will give to us if we come to him in faith, believing and pleading in his promises.

That even this very night are there and ours for the taking. For those of you who are familiar with the authorised version it puts us, it puts it like this.

[21 : 48] Jabez prays that the Lord would bless him indeed. The Lord would bless him indeed.

I had two great aunts they've passed on since who would often dispute with one another as to whether or not we could miss a blessing or translated from Gaelic whether we could put a blessing past ourselves.

One aunty was sure that there was absolutely no way that we could miss a blessing because God has foreordained whatsoever has come to pass and that whatever blessings are there for us we will have.

The other aunty was of the other opinion. She said yes we could so easily miss a blessing. We could so easily miss a blessing by deliberately not perhaps coming to hear the word preached or coming to read the word or deliberately not come before the Lord in prayer.

I'm sure that perhaps amongst yourselves you have different opinions as to whether we can miss a blessing but I have to say that I would be inclined to agree with Aunty number two that yes we can miss a blessing.

[23 : 19] I think that saying otherwise is bordering on fatalism that we just sit back and we wait for God to shower us with blessings from on high.

Yes God is sovereign we know that but yet man we you and I we still have a responsibility and just like Jabez we are to plead with God each and every day.

We are to be like Jacob of old who wrestled with God at Peniel and wouldn't let go until he received a blessing.

Perhaps you received a promise from the Lord many years ago that you're still waiting to see fulfilled. Might have been a promise telling you that one of your loved ones will indeed come and know the Lord as their own saviour but as far as you can see they've never been so far from the Lord.

Friends don't give up. Claimed that promise each and every day come before the Lord and plead his word before him because whether you see it or not one day it will be fulfilled.

[24 : 53] Now you might be sitting here tonight and thinking that this sermon really isn't for me.

I'm not a Christian I don't know anything of God's promises and I have no right really to go into these things I don't understand them.

How wrong you are. You know the Lord delights he absolutely delights in mercy and in his word he shows us that he delights in mercy because time and time again he makes so many promises to us that invites us to come and to know him as our Lord and saviour.

Romans 8 13 is a prime example it tells us that whosoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved not might be saved but will be saved.

What an encouragement that is to us and in exactly the same way that Jesus confidently and purposefully called on the name of the Lord so too can you.

[26 : 18] He promises that if you do so he will hear your voice. How then do you call upon the Lord you might be saying to yourself this evening what do I do?

Do I need a long prayer with special words? Do I need to be in a special place? No.

We only have to look at Luke 18 when we see the tax collector who prayed that prayer. I mentioned it this morning but I'll mention it again that prayer that had seven words.

The Lord have mercy on me a sinner.

You come you come with that prayer in the same confidence as Jesus you come and you believe that he's willing and able to answer your prayer just as you are wherever you are you plead his promise.

[27 : 39] You say to him this is not presumptuous friends to do this you say to him you say in your word that all those who come to the Lord who call upon his name will be saved.

I am calling upon your name and faith please hear my voice and save me.

You might be sitting here and saying I've been praying that prayer for years and still nothing.

You might be saying my prayers don't go past the ceiling. My God is not my God he's not hearing me.

My words aren't good enough my prayers aren't long enough. The devil will be telling you all sorts of things to make you give up.

[28 : 41] I'm too old I'm past it. God is not interested in me anymore. Friends it's all lies. You keep praying and I can absolutely guarantee you that the Lord will answer your prayer.

I remember when I was a wee boy I was desperately wanting to be a Christian more than anything. Sadly in my teenage years and in my early twenties I went astray into the world but I remember saying to my mum I really want to be saved.

I'm praying every night and I was praying every night and she said you keep praying. The Lord might not answer your prayer today and he might not answer your prayer tomorrow but he will answer it.

And so 13 or so years later he had answered that prayer. You plead God's promises. Oh that you would bless me and enlarge my border.

Now we see that these words relate to pleading God's promises but we can also apply these words to ourselves in a practical way.

[30 : 12] Prosperity preachers I don't know if you've ever seen these tele-evangelists such as Clefro Dollar and the like they would say that this kind of verse, this kind of prayer is a prayer for material gain.

But praying for the Lord to increase our borders means that if we pray to God he will give us all that we could possibly want the best of everything.

Yes we do as I said this morning we enjoy so many blessings in life, so many material blessings but equally there are so many in the world tonight who don't.

There are so many in this world tonight who are living in abject poverty. Does that then mean that this verse does not apply to them?

Of course not because what is an offer here is not an increase of our material wealth.

[31 : 20] Jesus promised it goes so much deeper than being blessed by things because you know if we are the Lord tonight we've been promised a land just like the children of Israel and he's promised us a land that stretches far greater than this land.

He offers us a land that is incorruptible, undefiled, that does not fade that New Jerusalem and that heaven where Christ is at the centre that's a thought.

And do you know as you sit here tonight want to know more of this land? Do you know to want to know more of this land here in your heart as you find yourself still in the world?

Do not want to have a sweeter closer walk with your precious saviour so that he would enlarge the border of your heart filling you with heavenly blessings here on earth.

Do you not desire that? Because I do. Do you not want to see more men and women and boys and girls being saved by the power of the Holy Spirit so that the border, the spiritual border of Carlyway would be enlarged?

[33 : 10] Wouldn't it be wonderful if we would see this church full? Wouldn't it be wonderful if we would see people drawn by the Holy Spirit to this place in answer to fervent prayer?

James 5.16 speaks of the prayer of faith. You might be familiar with this in the older version, the effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

Or as we have it here, the prayer of a righteous person has great power in its working, great power in its working.

John Hyde was an American missionary in the Punjab region of India. He quickly learned several of the local languages and became well known as one of rural India's most powerful preachers.

But after several years of ministry, he became discouraged. He became so unhappy with all of his evangelistic efforts.

[34 : 27] Nobody was coming. The kingdom was not being extended here on earth. So what did he do?

He turned to prayer. Yes, he was praying before, but he really turned to prayer. I'm not saying anything about the length that we should pray, but this was just his experience.

He prayed for hours and hours and hours, pleading that God would indeed bless his work.

And because he prayed so much, he became known as praying Hyde. And do you know what? I don't know why this should surprise us, but it worked.

It worked. And in the years that followed, many more, many more men and women and boys and girls in the Punjab area, they came to know the Lord as their savior.

[35 : 32] The prayer of a righteous man has great power in its working. Do we believe that tonight?

I touched on this last week, but we come here every week and we hear the word preached. And as far as I can see, this is a lovely, warm congregation who are very faithful to coming to hear the word preached.

But you know, it's so important, and I would extend this to every congregation. I would extend it to myself. It's so important that we don't just sit under the word, but that we would come to the Lord and that we would pray over the word.

When no one can see us, when no one knows about it, that we would take that time to come aside and to pray over the seed of the gospel that has been sown in this church even this day.

We don't need to go to early 20th century Punjab to see examples of answered prayer. Jesus in our island and in Karlaway itself have known immense, palpable times of the Lord's blessing in their midst, times of revival, times of renewal, times no doubt that followed the effectual fervent prayer of the men and women of these villages.

[37 : 34] Are we pleading with the Lord that His Holy Spirit would come into our community here in Karlaway?

Do we believe that this is a powerful spirit that can truly change lives?

We are in a day where we are so reliant on what we can see and hear and touch and feel, and if we're not able to see things, we struggle with it.

And I think that's why maybe, just maybe as a church generally, we struggle with that supernatural realm of laying hold of the fact that we have a powerful God who is able to do powerful things.

As Martin Luther put it, prayer is the mightiest of all weapons that created nature can wield. As someone else said, much prayer, much power.

[38 : 48] Jabez by faith believed in God's ability to answer prayer. Why don't we, if we're not already perhaps you are, why don't we really tap into the spiritual realm?

Yes, there are physical things that we need to do and that we can do to bring the Gospel to people. That's great. Let's keep doing that.

But let's tap into the spiritual realm that is ours for the taking. Let's try praying.

I think toiling in prayer can often be the most difficult and discouraging things for us to do.

Certainly speaking personally, we can come before God and find that just so quickly something else comes on our radar as it were.

[39 : 53] We lead such busy lives. We're easily distracted. But can I plead with you tonight?

Can I urge you that you would labour in prayer in that quiet place?

If you find it hard to pray as one once said, pray until you pray. If you find that you're getting nowhere, just carry on speaking with God.

Doesn't matter what your words are like. Pray until you pray. C.H. Spurgeon said when speaking about Jabez that his devotion was the key to his promotion.

His devotion was key to his promotion. And spiritually speaking so often what we get back from the Lord makes our labouring and prayer so worth it.

[41 : 02] Remember your elder, George, preaching a nest one Sabbath morning and telling us that in Christ we are multi-millionaires.

And you know how true that is. You may be a Christian here tonight and I'm nearly finished with this and you may be struggling with prayer.

You may be feeling that the riches of Christ have grown strangely dim in your own heart.

You may be feeling that his promises are so, so distant from you. You may be going through a difficult providence. I don't know what that is but maybe you're going through trials in life that are so difficult.

Tell my dear friend why don't you plead the promise of God that in you would plead the words of Isaiah 41.10 when the Lord says fear not for I am with you.

[42 : 18] Do not be dismayed for I am your God. I will strengthen you. I will help you. I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

Please God will honour his word. You might be here and you're not a Christian. Why aren't you? Maybe you don't want to be or maybe you haven't tried praying. Maybe you haven't really tried praying.

Coming before God just as you are. That's you friend. Why don't you plead the promise of Revelation 3.20.

Behold I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door I will come in to him and eat with him and he with me.

[43 : 34] You see I'm knocking Lord. I'm willing to open the door of my heart to you even tonight. Lord keep your word.

Perhaps you feel that you've opened the door of your heart many years ago and you are still waiting for Christ to come into your life so that you can eat with him and he with you.

Well dear friends in Carlyle. Christians. Non-Christians. We read at the end of our verse and God granted what he asked.

Like Jabez keep praying and keep on praying prayer and you know what friends individually as a congregation as a community we might just be amazed at what might happen.

Oh that he would truly bless us tonight and enlarge our spiritual border. Amen. We pray that the Lord would bless these few thoughts.