

HONORABLE IN GOD'S SIGHT

I Chronicles 4:9-10

"And Jabez was more honourable than his brethren: and his mother called his name Jabez, saying, Because I bare him with sorrow. And Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, Oh that thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast, and that thine hand might be with me, and that thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me! And God granted him that which he requested." I Chronicles 4:9-10.

Some very extended biographies are recorded in the Holy Scriptures. Therein much is said about Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, David, Solomon, etc., but of some men we are told very little.

While reading the long genealogies in First Chronicles my attention was arrested by the name of one man to whose biography God's Word has devoted only two whole verses. His biography not only arrested my attention and interest, but it also blessed my life. Two features of this biography are significant, namely, his ancestry and his achievements. Concerning them I now speak.

I. His Ancestry.

"And Jabez was more honourable than his brethren: and his mother called his name Jabez, saying, Because I bare him with sorrow" (I Chronicles 4:9). Hidden away in the long and comparatively uninteresting genealogical table of the undistinguished dead, like an oasis in the desert, is the name of Jabez. His name occurs only once in the Scriptures. Like a meteor in the Old Testament sky, Jabez appears once only and then vanishes. We know nothing at all about him except what is recorded in these two verses. Strangely enough, in the long genealogical table wherein Jabez is introduced to us, we do not find the name of either his father or his mother. The fact that his father is not mentioned is significant in Jewish records. It is interesting also to note that his mother is referred to without a name.

Of this man whose name thus shines, as a fine example to God's people in all ages, we know absolutely nothing beyond what is recorded in this brief passage of Holy Writ. Many and varied have been the guesses about his family connections, his occupation, and his circumstances, but it is useless for us to conjecture about these things.

What we do know about the mother of Jabez is that when he was brought into the world she did not welcome him. When an infant is born the mother is generally very happy. Unlike most mothers, this one was not joyful at the birth of her son. Whatever the reason for her sadness, when her friends gathered at the time of the naming of her baby, she said, "Call him Jabez," a name which means "sorrowful." That name was given to him by his mother in token and memory of the sorrow in which she bore her son. We do not know what was the cause of the mother's grief. Surely it was not due to unusual pains in childbirth and the great danger incident thereto that she fastened on the boy such a dark and gloomy appellation. It has been suggested that possibly their possessions may have been reduced to such an extent that they were in dire poverty and, therefore, another child would seem to be a burden rather than a blessing. Also, it may have been due to the fact that she lost her husband by death before she bore her child. Perhaps she felt as if she never could be happy again. In that event, the melancholy of her heart could have caused her to despair of any brightness, and to give her boy a depressing name. That sort of thing would be understandable. It is even possible that she

pictured her son growing up without a father's care and protection, and therefore having nothing but sorrow in the future. In any event she named him "Jabez," meaning "sorrowful."

A bad name is a tremendous handicap in life. Jabez had a poor start in life, bearing such a name, and yet he is like great multitudes of other boys. While it is true that thousands can tell of a godly father and a praying mother, there are still larger numbers who have no such memories with which to bless their pathways. Yet it remains true that out of such an environment have come men and women who have been noted for saintliness of life. Those who are reared in homes where there is no parental direction into the way of sanctity are handicapped greatly. When some of them have succeeded in spite of that handicap, it has not been due to ancestry or environment, but to the grace of God.

II. His Achievements.

"And Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, Oh that thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast, and that thine hand might be with me, and that thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me! And God granted him that which he requested" (I Chronicles 4:10). What a marvelous thing that God's Word can gather up a life and express it in a verse! The first sentence of that verse gives us the secret of his break with his ancestry and his environment. It is summarized in the words: "And Jabez called on the God of Israel." Following that simple statement, we have his prayer given to us. His remarkable prayer, as recorded in this verse, is the model prayer of the Old Testament. It was characterized by beauty, brevity, earnestness, and comprehensiveness. It clearly revealed the character of the man who prayed it.

Things for which Jabez prayed:

1. Peculiarity.

From the depths of his soul Jabez cried to God and said, "Oh that thou wouldest bless me indeed." He was pleading with the reverential directness and the eager importunity of a child who had a wise and loving father. He wanted something real. Many things are called blessings which are not. There is often a blessing in appearance which is not also a blessing in reality. Some things are blessings only in name. They gratify our wishes for the moment, but they cannot satisfy the higher and abiding cravings of the soul.

Feeling his dependence on God, Jabez wanted His special blessing. With earnestness and fervor he asked God for a very personal blessing. "Indeed" is the one word in that sentence which lets us know that Jabez had a great heart-cry for something very definite and real.

Years ago a hymn-writer felt a similar need in her soul and she voiced her feelings in the well-known words:

"Lord, I hear of showers of blessing
Thou art scattering full and free,
Showers the thirsty land refreshing,
Let some blessing fall on me.
Even me!

"Pass me not, O mighty Spirit,
Thou canst make the blind to see;
Witnesser of Jesus' merit,
Speak the word of power to me.
Even me!"

2. Possession.

Just three words express this great aspiration: "Enlarge my coast." There are those who do not seem to have any spiritual ambition or aspiration in life. They seem to be contented with just that which comes their way. But, thank God, there are some hearts which cry out with Jabez, "Enlarge my border." Do you as a Christian have a spiritual aspiration to accomplish more for the Lord? Opportunities face us everywhere, and we are being challenged today as never before to make our lives really count in the service of our Lord. If we are going to follow Christ, we must go to the ends of the earth, because that is where He is going.

3. Provision.

This prayer continues with the words, "And that thine hand might be with me." Conscious of his own weakness, Jabez prayed for the hand of God to be with him and to guide him. Only a godly man would pray in this manner. Such a man does not think that his own arm is strong enough, but he wants God's hand to lead, uphold and keep him.

It is a great joy and blessing to know that God's hand is with you when you go out to do His work. It matters little whose hands are against us if God's hand is upon us. God's hand is the one by which all of our needs shall be supplied. When His hand is with us we can be sure of daily provision. Paul wrote, "But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19).

The well-known preacher, John Robertson of Glasgow, had a little boy named after his father, and Johnny furnished his father with many an illustration, but none better than the one that was born of a day of anxiety which he gave to that father and mother. They had let him out into the backyard to play, feeling that he was perfectly safe there. But his long silence at last led the mother to investigate. To her dismay she saw the side gate open and no Johnny could be found. She followed out to the street, and her calls failed to produce any response. Then she inquired of neighbor boys with whom Johnny sometimes played, but no one had seen him. Then she notified her husband, and together they searched the community, but no Johnny could be found. At last they notified the police, and throughout that great city the word was passed and the search carried on all day, but in vain. Their anxiety was intense.

Toward evening word came that in a distant suburb a little lad had been found who said his name was Johnny. That father went as quickly as conveyance could carry him to that distant part. It was a poor section, and at last he came to the street and the number of the house given to him. It was a poor little cottage. He walked up, rapped at the door, and as soon as it was opened he saw his little laddie sitting in a chair. He asked no permission to enter, but rushed up and clasped him in his arms and then burst into tears. Later on he turned to express his gratitude to the little woman who had opened the door. As she stood holding her apron in her hands, she told the story of how she had seen the little lad walking along the street and crying. He said he was hungry, and she took him into her cottage. He did not know where his home was, so she notified the police.

Dr. Robertson put his hand into his pocket and took out everything he had and threw it into her apron, saying, "When I get home I will send you more." Then

it was the little woman's turn for emotion, as she exclaimed, "No, sir, I would not take more. It is just the amount of my rent." Then, she told her story of how she had been left a widow, and had struggled on in her poverty. But hard times had come. She was behind with her rent, and at last the landlord gave her notice to leave. The final day had come, and the next day she had to face the street and no home. That morning she had told her Heavenly Father her great and desperate need, and He who declared Himself the husband of the widow heard. He had taken the little lad with angel hands through the streets of busy Glasgow, no one heeding or paying any attention as he wandered on from street to street. He had led that little lad out to that very suburb, and to that very street. You may say that all of that was chance, but who counted the money in the pocket of the preacher? The little woman cried, "He has answered my prayer; it is just the amount of my rent." All we need in life's struggles and problems is to know that the hand of God is with us; then we do not need to fear any evil. His rod and His staff will comfort us.

4. Protection.

"And that thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me." As one looks at these words, the casual glance might lead him to think that Jabez had in mind protection from the outward dangers of life only. The hand of God is a sure defence from such dangers and from adverse providences. We are surrounded daily with dangers seen, but more often unseen. We stand on the edge of many a precipice without knowing it. Thank God for the rest that comes to the soul in the consciousness that He still gives His angels charge over His own to keep them. The safest place in which to dwell is in the secret place of the Most High.

Jabez was afraid of evil lest it should hurt him. His great desire was to be kept from evil, for he knew that sin could not produce anything but pain and tribulation in the end. From observation Jabez had been convinced that wrongdoing is never passed by without retribution; that "God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

Jabez had asked for great blessings in those four sentences. Then the record goes on to say, "And God granted him that which he requested." God granted his request because the petition was in accordance with His will. When we ask according to God's will He hears us, answers us and grants to us the things which we have requested.