

I invite you now to open your Bibles to this morning's scripture text, which can be found in the 1st book of Chronicles, chapter 4: verses 9-10. This can be found on page ___ in your pew Bibles. We continue in our series today "The Blessed Life". Today's scripture reveals the power of prayer to expand our ministries to build God's kingdom.

Our Fathers Word

1 Ch 4:9-10 (NKJV)

9 Now Jabez was more honorable than his brothers, and his mother called his name Jabez, saying, "Because I bore him in pain."

10 And Jabez called on the God of Israel saying, "Oh, that You would bless me indeed, and enlarge my territory, that Your hand would be with me, and that You would keep me from evil, that I may not cause pain!" So God granted him what he requested.

This is the word of God for the people of God

When was the last time God worked through you in such a way that you knew beyond doubt that God had done it? When was the last time you saw miracles happen on a regular basis in your life? Most believers wouldn't know how to ask for that kind of experience, or even if we should. As Christians, God's children, Jesus Christ's disciples, this is precisely God's will for our lives. The spiritual discipline that will bring this about, is prayer. Prayer is the open admission that without Christ we can do nothing. Prayer is an expression of faith in God's power, fueled by a desire for more of him.

We are taking this four-week series "The blessed life" to focus on prayer because prayer is the breath of the Christian life and because almost nothing decays so fast in the fallen human heart as the desire to pray. In other words, nothing is more vital than prayer in Christian existence, and few things are more vulnerable to neglect.

So, we must come back to it again and again and stoke the fire. So here we are coming back in our second week looking deeply at the prayer of Jabez. And I pray that the Lord will use these messages and Jabez's witness and the prayers of those who carry this burden to stir you up again to devote yourselves to prayer –

prayer in your private time with God each day over the Word,

prayer with your family at meals and in devotions,

prayer with husbands and wives,

prayer with roommates and friends,

prayer in small groups,

prayer in worship services,

and all the hundreds of prayers that ascend during the day as you walk by the Spirit and breathe out your dependence on God and he breathes into you the grace of faith and life and love and joy and obedience and witness.

In his great mercy to us, God meets us to stir us up to make new resolves and to be encouraged to encourage our brothers and sisters in Christ. One of the things he did this year is bring into my hands a little book by Bruce Wilkinson, *The Prayer of Jabez*.

As countless people have discovered; as we also can discover, including the prayer of Jabez in our prayers regularly, opens up our lives to God's mighty working releasing something miraculous into our lives. The change that takes place can be overwhelming. The increased blessings, the expanded purpose for being used by God, for God, truly being set aside for building His kingdom. If making disciples for Christ for the transformation of the world, and ushering in God's kingdom is your desire, then this prayer will strengthen you, and make you a more effective disciple for serving our Lord Jesus.

What are you praying over and over to God in the name of Jesus that he will make of your life? What are you asking God to make of you and your time on this earth? What part of God's purpose revealed in the Bible has captured your imagination and become a passion for you so that you take hold of God day after day and ask him to use you in it?

Let's take a moment to hear the *God inviting word's* of Jabez's prayer, his simple, believing prayer that changes futures; a prayer we should devote ourselves to praying each day.

***Oh, that You would bless me indeed,
and enlarge my territory,
that Your hand would be with me,
and that You would keep me from evil, that I may not cause pain!***

When we seek God's blessing as the ultimate value in life, we are throwing ourselves entirely into the river of His will and power and purposes for us. All our other needs become secondary to what we really want – which is to become wholly immersed in what God is trying to do in us, through us, and around us for His glory.

We discovered last week the very nature of God is to have goodness in so much abundance that it overflows in into our unworthy lives. God's nature is to bless. If you think about God in any other way than that, you must change the way you think. God's bounty is limited only by us, not by His resources, power, or willingness to give. Make a lifelong commitment to ask God every day to bless you – and while He's at it, bless you a lot! We too can be blessed as Jabez was blessed simply by refusing to let any obstacle, person, or opinion loom larger than God's nature.

This week our focus is Jabez's second petition in his prayer – a plea for more territory. *Oh, that You would enlarge my territory!* This is a plea asking God to *enlarge your life* so you can make a *greater impact for Him*. There is much more to this request than a simple desire for more real estate. He wanted more influence, more responsibility, and more opportunity to *make a mark for the God of Israel*.

The word territory can also be translated coast or borders. For Jabez that word carried the same emotional power as the words homestead or frontier did for generations of American pioneers. It spoke of a place of one's own with plenty of room to grow.

In Jabez's time part of Israel's recent history was Joshua's conquest of Canaan and the partitioning of the Promised Land into chunks of real estate for each tribe. When Jabez cried out to God, "Enlarge my territory!" he was looking at his present circumstances and concluding, "Surely I was born for more than this!" This is the same conclusion we should come to if our desire is to build God's kingdom.

As a farmer or herdsman, Jabez looked over the spread his family had passed down to him, ran his eye down the fence lines, visited the boundary markers, calculated the potential -- and made a decision: Everything You've put under my care, O Lord -- take it, and enlarge it. Let this be our prayer!

As we look at the current state of our church, as we see the family that God has put under our care, the ministries he has entrusted to us, while we consider the boundaries as we see them to calculate the potential of our growth and continued presence in this community, let us make the decision to ask God in prayer daily to take it, and enlarge it. Oh that you would enlarge our territory!

If our desire is to see our church family grow, if our desire is to grow more ministries in our local community, if our desire is to build God's kingdom right in the midst of our very lives and church, then we must ask God to take it, and enlarge it. Let this be our daily prayer.

Who's kingdom are you building? You may ask yourselves, "what kind of question is that?!" With statements we hear in our society like "my home is my castle," and "I'm building for my retirement." We must ask ourselves, "who's kingdom are we building?" We can focus on building with bricks and mortar, and material things of this world, or we can focus on building another type of kingdom that deals with the souls of people.

That kingdom is characterized and qualified through the gospel of Jesus Christ. It's characterized by forgiveness and mercy, by compassion, unity, and love. So my question to you again is, who's kingdom are you building? If our Father in heaven loves us infinitely and wants us in His presence every moment, and if He knows that heaven is a much better place for us, then why on earth has He left us here? Because God wants us to be moving out our boundary lines, taking in new territory for Him – building His kingdom – and reaching people in His name.

The Jabez prayer is a revolutionary request. Just as it is highly unusual to hear anyone pray, "God, please bless me!" so it is rare to hear anyone plead, "God, please give me more ministry!" Most of us think our lives are too full already. When we, in faith, start to pray for more ministry, amazing things occur. As your opportunities expand, your ability and resources supernaturally increase, too. Right away you'll sense the pleasure God feels in your request and His urgency to accomplish great things through you.

People will show up on your doorstep or at the table next to you. They'll start saying things that surprise even them. They'll ask for something – they're not sure what – and wait for your reply.

These encounters are Jabez appointments.

I can recall a Jabez appointment I experienced while on a mission trip in Mexico. On this particular day, we were taking a day off from our duties to the local community we were there to serve. It was to be a day of relaxation, shopping, and personal time. Relaxation and personal time I'm all in, but try to take me shopping, I tend to check out immediately, I typically don't last long, just ask Christy. You can usually find me in the lost husbands section, sitting on a chair, looking deflated and waiting for Christy to come take me home.

While the rest of our group went from shop to shop looking for souvenirs as memento's of their mission trip, I found myself just standing on the street outside the shops, observing all the people walking by, and talking to the Lord. *Lord, I am so thankful to be here as your servant, I prayed. I want to be your servant even now, send somebody who needs me.* I was praying for God to enlarge my territory.

As I stood there continuing to watch the crowd, I could see a woman down the street, walking slowly, head hung low, shoulders slouched, headed in my direction. Observing her as she crossed the street, I could see her face was red from crying, whipping tears from her eyes, she looked up, we made eye contact, and she made a bee line straight to me. *Yes, Lord. I see this is my appointment. Thank you for letting me serve you,* I prayed.

Also an American, She was in Mexico on vacation visiting her daughter, who was pregnant, and just delivered the first grandchild to the family. She began to pour out her story telling me about a terrible argument, and the verbal fight with her daughter that occurred the night prior. This confrontation resulted in her being out all-night walking, with no where to go because she was thrown out of the hotel they were staying in.

Not really having a solution for her problem, I simply spent several moments talking through several biblical principles for healthy relationships, then asked her if I could pray for her. Just at that moment about five other members of the mission group exited a shop. I called out to them to join us in prayer. With her permission we circled around her, laid hands upon her and began praying for healing, restoration, peace, love, joy, and reconciliation in her life, and in her relationship with her daughter.

As she departed down the road it was visibly apparent that healing had occurred. She was smiling, her head held high, with a pep in her step, she was almost skipping. Her joy had been restored as she told us she intended on going directly to see her daughter to apologize and make-up with her no matter what it took.

The next day as we sat eating at one of the local restaurants on this small exclusive beach there once again, approaching us, was this woman. Only this time, she was smiling from ear to ear, almost glowing. She was very excited to inform us that she was able to make up with her daughter. It is so truly amazing how God has these appointments arranged in our lives. Appointments that he makes in advance, intending for us to build His kingdom, for spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ to his children.

Whatever our gifts, education, or vocation might be, our calling is to do God's work on earth. If you want, you can call it living out your faith for others. You can call it ministry. You can call it every Christian's day job. But what ever you call it, God is looking for people who want to do more of it, because sadly, most believers seem to shrink from living at this level of blessing and influence.

For most of us, our reluctance comes from getting our numbers right, but our arithmetic completely wrong. For example, when we're deciding what size territory God has in mind for us, we keep an equation in our heart that adds up something like this:

My abilities + experience + training+ my personality and appearance + my past + the expectations of others = my assigned territory.

No matter how many sermons we've heard about God's power to work through us, we simply gloss over the meaning of that one little word *through*. Sure, we say we want God to work *through us* but what we really mean is *by or in association with*. Yet God's reminder to us is the same one He gave the Jews when they returned from captivity to a decimated homeland: "Not by might nor by power but by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts" (Zechariah 4:6)

Our God specializes in working through normal people who believe in a supernatural God who will do His work through them. What He's waiting for is the invitation. That means God's math would look more like this:

My willingness and weakness + God's will and supernatural power = my expanding territory.

When you start asking in earnest – begging – for more influence and responsibility with which to honor Him, God will bring opportunities and people into your path. You can trust Him that He will never send someone to you whom you cannot help by His leading and strength. You'll nearly always feel fear when you begin to take new territory for Him, but you'll also experience the tremendous thrill of God carrying you along as you're doing it. You'll be like John and Peter, who were given the words to say at the moment then needed them.

One day about one year ago to this day, in answer to my prayer for an enlarged ministry, I received a call from district superintendent Rev Ockey and Bishop Palmer, who informed me that after prayerful discernment, they were calling to offer me a local pastor position. At which point I fell on my knees, amazed, and completely humbled, that God was planning much more for my life than I would have ever expected. But it is only by His will and supernatural power that my territory was expanded.

To pray for larger borders is to ask for a miracle – it's that simple. A miracle is an intervention by God to make something happen that wouldn't normally happen. That, and nothing less, was what Jabez had to have to transcend his name and transform his circumstances.

Do you believe miracles still happen? Many Christians do not. Miracles don't have to break natural law to be a supernatural event. When Christ stilled the storm, He didn't set aside universal law – the storm would eventually have subsided on its own. Instead, He directed the weather pattern. When Elijah prayed for it to stop raining, God directed the natural cycle of drought and rain.

In the same way, God's miracle-working powers were clearly in evidence when, knowing that young woman's needs, brought us together in Mexico. When, knowing my desire to serve God, my calling as Pastor was fulfilled. So many other countless arrangements that God continues to work in and around, and through us all for building His kingdom.

The most exhilarating miracles in my life have always started with a bold request to expand God's kingdom A LOT! When you take little steps, you don't need God.

It's when you thrust yourself in the mainstream of God's plans for this world – which are beyond our ability to accomplish – and plead with Him, *Lord, use me – give me more ministry for You!* – that you release miracles. At that moment, heaven sends angels, resources, strength, and the people you need. I've seen it happen hundreds of times.

God always intervenes when you put His agenda before yours and go for it! Amazingly, if you have prayed to the Lord to expand a border, you *will* recognize His divine answer. You'll have a front-row seat in a life of miracles.

Heavenly Father,

We Love you, and we bless you

We lift up our hearts with great thanksgiving for sending us your Son,

Our Lord, Jesus Christ

As we continue to grow in his image, as his disciples

We ask that you continue to lead us and guide us,

Hear our plea *Lord, use us – give us more ministry for You!*

release your miracles to strengthen and equip us to build your kingdom.

Father use us each and every day, moment by moment,

as your ambassadors of love, your ministers of hope

with all those that you send across our paths.

May we bring you all the praise, all the honor, and all the glory.

Amen.