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Sermon preached by Mr. J. Raven at Shaw's Corner, Redhill,  
on Sunday evening, 3rd. December, 1950

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"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, O 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". 1 Chronicles 4.9,10

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This is a very sweet passage, occurring as it does in a chapter that otherwise consists exclusively of scores of names. In what promises to be a chapter very dull in the reading, one suddenly comes across this beautiful passage in reference to Jabez. It is the only thing we are told about Jabez in the Scriptures, but what an honourable mention it is! We read, first of all, that "Jabez was more honourable than his brethren: and his mother called his name Jabez, saying, because I bare him with sorrow". Although she bare him with sorrow, yet she had more reason to rejoice in this son Jabez than in all her other children, for he "was more honourable than his brethren". He was evidently the best of the family. We have known of families where the Lord has taken just one of the family and called him or her by His grace, and left the rest in nature's darkness to fill up the measure of their iniquity. What distinguishing favour this is! and the one so favoured will take no credit to himself; he will readily say with the poet,

"What was there in me that could merit esteem,  
Or give the Creator delight?  
'Twas even so Father, we ever must sing,  
Because it seemed good in thy sight".

I knew of one who was such a case as I have mentioned, one called out of a very ungodly family, and yet in speaking of the merciful kindness of the Lord to her, she would speak of herself as the least worthy of all the family. She saw in herself a degree of unworthiness that she could not perceive in the others. Of course, she knew her own heart, and she did not know their hearts, and we may learn from this 9th. verse, that the end of a thing is better than the beginning of it. Jabez' mother bare him with sorrow, and certainly in spiritual things there is a more or less sorrowful beginning. John Bunyan has this phrase which he puts into the

the soul, the beginning of it is manifest in sorrow of heart, but O, what a merciful sorrow it is! What a merciful affliction it is that is a means of driving the soul to the good Physician! When a man feels his lost condition, his consciousness of his lost condition makes him prize the Saviour, and seek the Lord's face.

Well, we are told of Jabez that "he called on the God of Israel". Mr. Hart in his beautiful hymn on this passage, says,

"Had he to any other prayed,  
To us it had not mattered what"

"Jabez called on the God of Israel". Just look at this for a moment or two. "The God of Israel". You remember how Jacob came to have the name of Israel given to him. It was at the ford Jabbok when he had sent all his party over the river and he remained alone and there wrestled with him a man till the breaking of the day. We are told that the man touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh so that the sinew shrank, and Jacob halted upon his thigh, but strength was given him to wrestle. The man said, "Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me", and we are told, "He blessed him there". And the Lord said, "Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed". Now you see the force of the word here, the "God of Israel". Jabez called on the God of Israel, that God who hears prayer, who suffers, and indeed enables, poor people to wrestle with Him by prayer. Not only does He suffer it, but He gives power to do it. O, if we have grace to wrestle with God in prayer, it is His merciful gift.

"Prayer is the breath of God in man,  
Returning whence it came:  
Love is the sacred fire within  
And prayer the rising flame."

"Jabez called on the God of Israel", the God who is the Author of all real prayer, and the hearer of all sincere prayer. He suffers Himself to be overcome by the importunate, wrestling prayer of poor people. You remember in the Song of Solomon the Lord says, "Turn away thine eyes from me, for they have overcome me", "Thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes". O, the Lord is greatly taken with the desires and the trembling petitions of poor people, He suffers Himself to be overcome, as the Lord Jesus suffered Himself to be overcome by the Syrophenecian woman. Although He seemed to set her back, seemed to hold out no hope of any success in her petition, but rather rebuffed her, yet she turned what seemed to be a rebuff into a plea, and the Lord graciously suffered Himself

to be overcome. We might therefore apply the word, "Turn away thine eyes from me, for they have overcome me". Thus the woman got her will, she got her petition, and so Jabez called upon the God of Israel.

What a mercy it is that there is a God who hears and answers prayer, and what a mercy it is to know that God, so to know Him as, like Jabez, to call upon His name, like Daniel, to set one's face to seek the Lord by prayer and supplication. "Jabez called on the God of Israel". "He that cometh to God must believe that He is". Then Jabez, since he came to Him, since he called upon the God of Israel, must have believed that He is, or he would not have called upon Him, he would not have come. "Without faith it is impossible to please Him; for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him". So "Jabez called on the God of Israel saying, O that thou wouldest bless me indeed".

Here is the first clause of his petition, "O that thou wouldest bless me indeed". In reading I noticed David's words, "With thy blessing let the house of thy servant be blessed for ever" (2 Samuel 7.29) and pointed out that it was not any sort of blessing that David would be content with, but it must be the special blessing of God. So here, "O that thou wouldest bless me indeed". The man wanted a real blessing, a substantial blessing; he was not satisfied with bubbles, he was not satisfied with those things that perish with the using, with things that merely please and pamper the flesh; he wanted a blessing that would do his soul eternal good. "O that thou wouldest bless me indeed", and is it not a great thing for God to bless a sinner? Is it not a great thing for God to bless one who deserves to be cursed? It is a wonderful thing, a wonderful thing for a man, who by reason of his sinfulness and his sins deserves the curse of God, to be enabled to call on the God of Israel and say, "O that thou wouldest bless me indeed". There is a way whereby God is able to bless a sinner, I say, He is able to bless a sinner. You remember it was said to Abraham, "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed", and again in the Psalms it is said of Christ, "And men shall be blessed in Him". This blessing, then, is in and through Jesus Christ; it is for the sake of His Name, on the ground of what He has accomplished, on the ground of what He is, on the ground of His precious blood and His all-sufficient and everlasting righteousness that God is able to bless a sinner. "O that thou wouldest bless me indeed". And you remember that the Psalmist, when he is calling upon his soul to bless the Lord, calling upon all his

inward powers to bless and praise the name of the Lord, begins with this: "Who forgiveth all thine iniquities". He speaks of the first and foremost of all the blessings that God bestowed upon him, and indeed a blessing that has every other blessing wrapped up in it. If my sins are pardoned, then I can lack no good thing; if my sins are forgiven then all that is really good and all that I need to make me blest in time and throughout eternity, is mine, wrapped up in that great blessing, the forgiveness of sins. So in praying that he might be blessed indeed, Jabez was first of all intent upon the pardon of his sins. O, where are the people who are intent upon getting that from the Lord, the pardon of their sins? The pardon of my sins? Some will say, "Why, I have no sins". There are many people who do not stop to think whether they have any sins or not, they are utterly indifferent as to that matter, and if you speak to them about their need of forgiveness, they receive your testimony with scorn. They need no forgiveness. "I have always lived a good life, I have always done my duty, I have paid my way, I have done this and that; at any rate, I am not so bad as a good many people". There is no sense of their need of forgiveness, but evidently Jabez felt his need of pardon, and no blessing could really come to him, no real blessing but in the way of forgiving love. "O that thou wouldest bless me indeed". You remember one of our hymns very beautifully says,

"Blest with the pardon of her sin,  
My soul beneath thy shade would lie,  
And sing the love that took me in,  
While others sank in sin to die".

and the Psalmist says, "Blessed is the man whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity and in whose spirit there is no guile". O then, this is the blessing that an awakened sinner's heart will be intent upon; a sinner convinced of his sin by the Holy Ghost will be intent upon this blessing. This is what he must have. "For thy name's sake, O Lord, pardon mine iniquity, for it is great". And when a man gets it, when the Holy Ghost bears witness with the blood of Christ that a man's sins are forgiven him, O the bliss of it! the bliss of it! O what peace, what blessedness, what a sense of divine love flow into the soul when a man is blessed with the forgiveness of his sins. There is something of heaven in it. One says, "'Tis the rich gift of love divine". The bliss of it is known by tasting. You can know nothing of the bliss of it by mere hearsay, hearing the minister or some other person talk about the forgiveness of sins. Reading about it in our hymns or in the Scriptures will

give you no just idea of the blessedness of a blood-bought pardon - it must be known and felt. And this is the blessing that Jabez was intent upon. "O, that thou wouldest bless me indeed". He knew, and every spirit taught soul is brought to know this, that if he could get this blessing then all would be well. If you know what it is to receive pardon, then you know what it is to have a blood purged conscience, to have the blessed assurance "Then was I in His eyes as one that found favour". "O, that thou wouldest bless me indeed". This blessing must come from the Lord Himself, the Lord only can seal it upon the heart. No word I can utter can convey it, no lips of mere man can convey it to a sinner's soul, it must be by the witness of the Holy Spirit as He bears witness to the atoning blood of the Lord Jesus, and how blessedly He does it! Here is a poor sinner, loaded with guilt, filled with despair because of his actual and original pollution, his appears a hopeless case, and then the blessed Spirit of God comes in with the blood of Christ, with the love of Christ, and opens to him the meaning of such Scriptures as this, "For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly". "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us", "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief". As the Spirit of God unveils the grace of these Scriptures, O what a vista of heavenly, saving grace is revealed in the heart and conscience! What unspeakable blessedness it brings into the heart to realise forgiveness! It will make the heart melt in love before the Lord, and how the soul will want to be His! "O Lord, truly I am thy servant; I am thy servant, and the son of thine handmaid: thou hast loosed my bonds". "O that thou wouldest bless me indeed".

Then the next thing is, "and enlarge my coast". You know the Israelite in those days often possessed only a portion of his inheritance because of the Canaanites that were in the land. Until he dispossessed the Canaanite, he could not enter fully into possession of his inheritance, and so it often happened that a portion of the inheritance was still in the hands of the Canaanites. Well, Jabez prayed that the Lord would enlarge his coast. Now, does that not illustrate for us the case of a child of God who has not entered yet into the full possession of his inheritance. "There remaineth yet very much land to be possessed", but there are these Canaanites. There is, for instance, the power of indwelling sin, there is the working of the flesh, and there is all the vile working of the devil,

who "as a roaring lion walketh about, seeking whom he may devour". By reason of all these things a child of God may often be much straitened, and he does not often enjoy that full assurance that he longs for. His hope is a trembling sort of hope; he has a good many shakings about it; he is not able to come to any certain conclusion as to his standing and his safety; and yet he is not without hope. There is a little hope, like a tiny shoot springing up from the soil, "First the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear" we read. A man's hope may be just like the first coming of the tiny shoot from the earth. Jabez prayed that the Lord would enlarge his coast. The hymn writer says,

"And give my straitened bosom room,  
To credit what thy promise saith,  
And wait till thy salvation come".

O, how you need the Lord to work for you against these Canaanitish enemies of yours, this indwelling sin, this working of the devil who finds so much to work on in your wretched heart, and also the allurements of this world, the many enticing things that are dangled before your eyes. All these hamper the soul so that it is constrained to say, "Enlarge my coast". There is the power of unbelief. O what an enemy of the peace of God's people is unbelief! The hymn writer says something like this, "Break off our legal chains, O God, and let our souls go free". O how a child of God does need to be delivered from the spirit of unbelief and legality which so holds him in bondage, that expectation of being something bettered in himself which prevents him from venturing as a poor, vile sinner, who can do nothing at all, upon a complete and able and willing Saviour. Philpot, I think, described as "like leaping overboard in a storm" to venture upon Christ, and yet it is only thus venturing that a man experiences the enlarging of his coast, when he is enabled to make that great venture of a naked sinner upon Christ and Christ alone. "And enlarge my coast", that is lead me into that fair land of gospel liberty. Do you sometimes think of the liberty of the gospel with a longing in your heart to be led into it? You feel to know so little about it, if anything, and at the most all you can speak of is a kind of Pisgah-like view of it; as Moses viewed the promised land but was not allowed to enter into it, so you may have had a view of the land of gospel liberty but you have not entered into it yet. "O that thou wouldest .... enlarge my coast", lead me into the liberty of Thy own sons and daughters, the liberty wherewith Christ makes His people free, the liberty spoken of in the 8th. Romans, "There is

therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus". "O that thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast". Deliver me from all contractions, from all those things that do so straiten me and so hold in bondage, and bring me so much disquietness of heart!

"And that thine hand might be with me". He felt the need of his God to be with him because he was weak and utterly insufficient. Now is that your feeling and your exercise, that you are so weak that unless the hand of God is with you you are in a helpless, hopeless case? We read of one that "the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob". "And that thine hand might be with me". Mr.Hart, in that wonderful hymn of his "What it is to be a Christian", speaks like this in one verse,

"Every moment be receiving  
Strength, and yet be always weak".

Now that exactly describes the way the Lord deals with His people. They receive strength, sufficient strength continually, and yet never lose their sense of weakness, their sense of absolute dependence upon the power of God. "And that thine hand might be with me". How are temptations to be overcome? How is sin to be resisted? and the devil vanquished? Not in our own strength certainly, but only by the hand of God upon us. And it is He who gives power, "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts." Jabez could only hope to overcome his enemies as the hand of God was with him. See how he felt his dependence.

Then he says, "And that thou wouldest keep me from evil that it may not grieve me". What a suitable prayer this is, "that thou wouldest keep me from evil". Do you not find your hearts, some of you, ever prone to run into evil? Mr.Hart confesses,

"That mariner's mad part I played,  
That sees, yet strikes the shelf".

What a great deal of keeping we need, at least I do. I have to prove that I am quite incapable of keeping myself.

"To do what's right unable quite,  
And almost as unwilling".

That thou wouldest keep me from evil". "Kept", says Peter, "by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time". "And that thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me". You see, if a child of God is entangled in any evil thing it is sure to bring him a crop of trouble. If he transgresses, if he oversteps the bounds in any particular, there is sure to be a rod in pickle for him, for "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth". "And

that thine hand might be with me, and that thou wouldest keep me from evil", and only God can, and He is

"So strong to deliver, so good to redeem,  
The weakest believer that hangs upon Him".

"Keep me from evil", evil of all sorts, evil within me, evil without me, for "All things to promote our fall show a mighty fitness". "Keep me from evil that it may not grieve me".

"And God granted him that which he requested". As I said almost at the outset, he called on the God of Israel, the God who hears prayer, the God who does things for those who trust in Him, "And God granted him that which he requested". O if it is in your heart to pray this prayer of Jabez unto the God of Israel, He will not be a barren wilderness to you, and indeed, He is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think. He gives beyond the asking, what a mercy that He does, because after all, in our best petitions we are very contracted, our askings are very limited, unbelief has a great hand in limiting our petitions, but the Lord is able to do exceeding abundantly above all we can ask or think. We little realise what great things a praying soul is warranted to ask at the throne of grace. "Open thy mouth wide", says the Lord, "and I will fill it". We open our mouths so little in our petitions, do we not? I have repeated before now the words of one of the old Scotch divines who said, "Seek a little grace from the Lord because you deserve no more? You do not deserve even that, therefore seek a whole sea of grace of Him. Seek not according as your worthiness warrants you to seek, but ask as it becomes His grace and His glory to give." O may the Lord enlarge our hearts to bring large petitions to His mercy seat, to ask great things of Him, yea, to be satisfied with nothing short of Himself, because after all, to be blessed indeed is to be blessed with the Lord God for our God, to have Him say to us, I am thy God, I am thy Redeemer, thy Husband, thy Surety, thy Friend, thy Strong Tower, thy All in All.

"Less than Thyself will not suffice  
My comfort to restore,  
More than thyself I cannot crave,  
And thou canst give no more"

"O, that thou wouldest bless me indeed"

"Thyself bestow, for Thee alone,  
My all in all, I pray"

May then, this prayer of Jabez be written upon our hearts and the substance of it be breathed out at the mercy seat again and again.

Amen

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