

Jabez a Lonely Man

by John Phillips

Jabez, a lesser-known Bible character, solves his problem of being unwanted and unloved by reading the Bible and praying to God for help and guidance.

Duration: 43:43

Scripture: Genesis 32:26, 1 Chronicles 2:55, 1 Chronicles 4:10, Matthew 6:33, Matthew 27:5, Luke 22:21, 2 Corinthians 12:2-4

Topics: "Jabez"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher begins by discussing a cartoon that appeared in an American newspaper during the time of the moon landing. The cartoon depicts two astronauts on Mars, with one of them broadcasting back to Earth. The preacher then transitions to the story of Jacob and Rachel from the Bible, highlighting the significance of their son's name. He also mentions a man named JBas who made a great impact on his generation, leading to the establishment of a city named after him. The sermon concludes with a prayer thanking God for providing solutions to our problems.

Transcript

I thought this evening to introduce you to one of the lesser known Bible characters. In fact, when I read the verses that approach the story of this man, you will perhaps think that there is something very peculiar about the scripture reading this evening. Shall we turn please to 1 Chronicles chapter 4, and we shall start reading at verse 5. 1 Chronicles chapter 4, and we shall start reading at verse 5. I don't know exactly what you got out of that.

Quite frankly, I've never been able to make very much of it myself. But look at the next verse. 1 Chronicles chapter 4, and we shall start reading at verse 5. We'll add his own blessing to the reading of his word.

I'm sure we must have often wondered why it is that the Holy Spirit, in writing a book which will outlast all the suns and stars of space, a book hewn out of the very stuff of eternity, why he should put into that book so many long lists of uninteresting names. But when you stop to think about it, it's rather wonderful that he does. I'm so glad that we have a God who likes to write names into his book.

It is said concerning the Lord Jesus that he knoweth his own sheep by name. About the time the Americans put the first man on the moon, there was a cartoon appeared in one of our American newspapers. It depicted two astronauts.

They had been, just the two of them, together in a space capsule for months, journeying through the vastness of space. They had arrived finally at the planet Mars. The spacecraft had touched down, the door was open, the steps had been lowered.

The captain of the spaceship was depicted coming down the steps with a microphone in his hand. Behind him, just peering over his shoulder, you could see his co-pilot. The captain was broadcasting back to Earth.

He was saying, this is William P. Throgmorton, broadcasting to you from the surface of Mars. What's-his-name and I have just made it. Aren't you glad tonight God doesn't have any what's-his-name? Wouldn't it be disconcerting to get home to heaven, and you go in through the pearly gates of the celestial city, and you go right up to the very throne of God? And the Lord Jesus says to you, welcome home.

I'm so glad you're here. By the way, what's your name? Well, we take it for granted that he knows our name. Of course he does.

When God wanted to teach that truth to his Old Testament people Israel, whenever the priest, the high priest, went into the sanctuary in his garments for glory, he carried the names of God's people upon the onyx stones upon his shoulder, and he carried the names of God's people engraven in precious stones upon the breastplate upon his heart. And thus, whenever he went into the sanctuary, he carried with him the names of the people of God. And that is what our great high priest is doing right now.

He's carrying our name into the presence of his Father in heaven. He's talking to his Father about you by name. That, of course, is the great difference, isn't it, between a believer and an unbeliever.

You remember the story of the rich man and Lazarus. Everybody knows the story and the name of Lazarus, the beggar man who sat at the rich man's gate, full of sores, the very dogs of the city, kinder to him than that rich man. We all know the name of Lazarus.

His name was well known in heaven. When God sent the angel to bring him home, he knew exactly who he was and where he was. But what was the name of the rich man? Nobody knows his name.

He woke up in a lost eternity to the terrible realization that he had become a nameless non-entity. Because one of two things happened to us in this life. Either our sins get blotted out or our name gets blotted out.

When God blots out our sins, he sovereignly dismisses them from his mind forever. He says, your sins and your iniquities will I remember no more. And if that's what happens when he blots out our sins, surely that's also what happens when he blots out men's name.

To wake up in a lost eternity to the terrible realization that God himself no longer remembers who you are. And so we have these long lists of names in the Bible. And here, like an oasis in the desert, we have the name of a man called Jabez.

Now, Jabez was a man who had a problem. And significantly and appropriately enough, given the context, the problem had to do with his name. It says that his mother called his name Jabez, saying, because I bear him with sorrow.

There's something almost ominous about that. In the Old Testament, the great ambition of a young Hebrew woman was not only to get married and have children, but supremely to have a man-child. To give birth to a little boy.

For every devout Hebrew mother hoped that perhaps she would be the one who would bring into the world the seed of the woman. That perhaps her son would turn out to be his son. And here was a young woman who had brought a man-child into the world.

And instead of it being an occasion for great rejoicing, as it was in the family of Abraham when Isaac was born, it was an occasion for sorrow. There was something about the circumstances of this particular birth. Instead of bringing joy to his mother, he brought sorrow.

In fact, the circumstances of his birth were such, they were so tragic and so weighted down with unhappy memories, that his mother gave him a name which would forever commemorate that fact. And he grew up with this problem, that he was an unwanted child, or at least that his birth, instead of bringing joy to his mother, had brought the very opposite. One doesn't have to be a great psychologist to know that that would do something to his disposition.

I read some years ago where a psychiatrist did a study of 15,000 delinquents, and he discovered that those with odd or peculiar names were in trouble four times as often as other children. And this did something to Jabez. Every time his name was mentioned, as he grew old enough to understand, he realized that there was something about him that was unpleasant, and it soured his disposition.

It gave him what we would call today a complex. It embittered him. I can see him when some new kid came on the block, and the new boy in town said, Hello, what's your name? And he'd double up his fist, and he'd say, Jabez, do you want to make something of it? And I suppose his whole life was soured by this fact.

Connected with his name and with his birth. And then he decided that he would do something about his problem. And what he did with his problem is most instructive.

I know what most people do with their problems today. They go and dump them on the pastor as if he wants them. What on earth does he want with other people's problems? Most pastors I know have got enough of their own.

Or else they take them to a psychiatrist. And they pay enormous sums of money to spill it all out into his ears. And he's just counting how much money's coming in per minute.

I have a psychiatrist friend who lives in the city of Milwaukee in the northern part of the United States. And he told me one time that every psychiatrist has to have a psychiatrist. He was a good friend of mine.

I used to be in his home quite a lot at one time. He was a Christian, knew and loved the Lord, but he'd walk around his home in a Roman toga. I don't know if he thought he was Nero or what he thought.

That magnificent home, he had a full-size indoor swimming pool in his home. That was the nice part of being a psychiatrist. When he came home from work, he used to put on a scuba mask and go and sit in the bottom of his pool.

Well, that's not the thing to do with your problem. Jabez tells you what to do with your problem. It drove him, first of all, to his Bible.

And then it drove him to his knee. And I'm going to suggest to you what happened. He said to himself one day, I wonder if anybody has ever had a problem just like mine.

I think I'll start to read my Bible and see if God has anything to say in his word about my kind of problem. That's a very sensible thing to do because the Bible is a book about people and it's a book about problems and it's a book about principles. To guarantee you unconditionally, no matter what your problem is, if you'll only give God a chance, he'll face you with that problem within the covers of this book and tell you what to do about it.

And I can see Jabez, he starts to read. He says to himself, I think I'll start at the beginning. And he's reading through the book of Genesis and all of a sudden he comes across this statement.

Now remember, his mother called his name Jabez saying, because I bear him with sorrow. This is what he read. His mother called his name Ben-Oni, but his father called his name Benjamin.

Benjamin. Now since he was a Hebrew, Jabez would read his Bible in Hebrew so he didn't need to have those names translated. And what he actually read was this.

His mother called his name Ben-Oni, his mother called his name son of my sorrow, but his father called his name Benjamin, son of my right hand. And he stopped and stared at the page and he said, I've just met myself in the Bible. His mother called his name Jabez saying, because I bear him with sorrow.

His mother called his name Ben-Oni, son of my sorrow. And like an intelligent reader of the Bible, he began to read in the larger context. That's always important because when you're hunting for some kind of a solution to a problem, one often has the tendency just to take a text out of context.

I suppose you've heard the story about the man who did that. Flipped his Bible open and plonked his finger down looking for some guidance and it said, Judas went out and hanged himself. Well, he didn't like that, so he tried again.

And the next time it said, go thou and do likewise. And he didn't like that either. And the next time it said, what thou doest, do quickly.

Well, that's no way to treat the Bible. You wouldn't treat any other book like that. Somebody studying for his finals in chemistry or physics or biology or whatever, if he treated his textbook like that, would guarantee himself a failing grade.

So he read the larger context. He said to himself, I wonder why it is that Jacob wouldn't call that little boy Ben-Oni, son of my sorrow. The circumstances were very interesting.

Rachel was dying, dying in childbirth. And as she is slipping away into eternity, she has one last request. Now, Jacob loved Rachel.

He loved her with all his heart. She was the only wife he ever wanted. The other women were shoved off on him one way or another.

The only wife he ever wanted was Rachel. He loved her. It was the one thing that rings true in the life of Jacob all down through his backslidden years.

He loved Rachel. There was nothing he wouldn't do for Rachel. And now Rachel's dying.

And as she slips away across Jordan, she calls back to Jacob and she says, I'll never ask you for anything again. I want you to call him Ben-Oni, son of my sorrow. Jacob could easily have done that.

His own heart was broken. But as he looked at that little boy and looked into the dying face of his beloved Rachel, he calls across the river. He says, I'm not going to do it.

I'm going to call him Benjamin, son of my right hand. And Jabez looks at the story and he says to himself, I wonder why Jacob wouldn't call that little boy Ben-Oni, son of my sorrow. Even when his own heart was broken.

And he read again in the even larger context of the story and he discovered that all his life, Jacob had suffered because of his name. That when he was born, the circumstances of his life were such that they called him Jacob, cheat, supplanter, literally one who takes you by the heel. Or as we would say today, one who twists your arm.

And Jacob decided if he was going to be called a cheat, he might just as well be one. Until the day came when God brought him to the Jabbok and broke him in order to bless him. We all remember the story how he wrestled that night with the Jehovah angel.

And as the rising sun began to shoot its beams across the sky, a broken Jacob, no longer fighting, but clinging to the living God. He says, I'll not let you go except you bless me. And God said, all right, what's your name? He said, oh God, my name is Jacob.

I'm just a cheat. That's all I am. And God said, I've been waiting for 20 years to hear you say that.

And now I can bless you. And as Jacob stared at the story, he said to himself, oh God, if you could do that for Jacob, you can do it for me. His problem drove him to his Bible.

I know what you're saying. You're saying, where'd you get all that from? Well, I just got it by using a little bit of sanctified imagination. It says concerning Jacob that he called upon the God of whom? Why, the God of Israel.

And what did he say? Why, said the very thing that Jacob said. The night that God changed his name from Jacob to Israel. He said, I'll not let you go except you bless me.

Jabez said, oh that thou wouldest bless me. Indeed. So I submit to you that his problem drove him to his Bible.

And that he found the answer to his problem within the pages of this blessed book. That's the best place in all the world to find the answer to your problem. In the case of Jacob, God took the problem away.

But in the case of Jabez, he didn't. He did something else. God doesn't always take our problems away.

To us, of course, that's the only solution to our problem. Paul had a problem, you remember? He had seen such astonishing visions. He'd been caught up into the third heaven.

He'd seen things which were untranslatable. And consequently, God gave him what he calls a thorn in the flesh. A messenger of Satan to buffet me.

That expression, a messenger of Satan. It's the usual New Testament word for angel. You could translate it, an angel of Satan to buffet me.

It may have been a physical ailment, or it may have been a spiritual problem. What would it be like, think you, to have one of Satan's hierarchy forever whispering in your ear? Forever injecting evil thoughts into your mind? Forever seeking to lead you astray and trip you up so that you might become a disgrace? To that holy name of Jesus, having borne that testimony before King. Whatever it was, Paul asked God three times to take it away, and God said, No, I have the slightest intention of taking it away.

I gave it to you, and I want you to live with it, but I'm going to give you grace to overcome it. Now, this problem of Jabez not only drove him to his Bible, it drove him to his knees. And he prayed one of the most interesting little prayers in the Old Testament.

One of the things that has greatly astonished me about the Bible prayers is their brevity. Truly, we are not heard for our much speaking. Longest prayer in the Bible is Solomon's prayer of dedication of the temple.

He could read the whole thing slowly in ten minutes. Oh, that thou wouldst bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast, that thine hand might be with me, that thou wouldst keep me from evil. He asked God for four very simple things.

He said to God, Oh God, please, I should like to be a blessed man. You know that word that's translated blessed in the Old Testament? You meet it so often in the Hebrew hymn book. Very first psalm begins with the word blessed.

It really means happy, and the scholars tell us that it's always in the plural. That you could really translate that happy, happy is the man who doesn't do this, and doesn't do that, and doesn't do the other, the power of negative thinking, but who does do this. Jabez said, Oh God, please, I'd like you to make me a happy, happy man.

My life has never been a blessing to anyone. I wasn't even a blessing to my mother when I was born. But I've got a sour disposition, and I don't like myself, and I'd like you to change me.

And I want you to make me what I'm not by nature. I want you to make me happy. Make me a happy, happy man.

Bless me, indeed, and enlarge my coast. Oh God, he said, I not only want you to make me a blessed man, I want you to make me a bigger man. I'm tired of my life, it's so narrow, so circumscribed.

I'm all turned in upon myself, and all shriveled up. I want you to enlarge my coast. You know, there was only one way in the Old Testament that a Jew could enlarge his coast.

Now, of course, he could go into business, and if he was good at it, he could buy up all the surrounding property, he could buy up all the village, for that matter. In fact, he could buy up all the surrounding countryside. When the year of Jubilee came, he had to give it all back.

You imagine what that would do to him. There was a very good reason why God made his Old Testament people do that. For example, here's a piece of property, and it's the year of Jubilee, and it's just gone back

to its original owner.

And we'll say it's worth 50,000 pounds, almost said dollars. 50,000 pounds. Well, the next year, it's only worth 49,000.

And the year after that, it's only worth 48, and then 47. Until the time passes, and you get closer and closer to the next year of Jubilee, and that piece of property started off being worth 50,000, it's now only worth 3,000, 2,000, 1,000, not worth anything, because you've got to give it back next year. And of course, God did that with his Old Testament people, because he wanted to teach even his earthly people the decreasing value of material things.

You can't take it with you, you see. You can send it on ahead. In fact, a preacher friend of mine says, if you want to have treasure in heaven, you'd better give some money to somebody who's going there.

So when Jabez prayed, I want you to make me a bigger man, well, it wasn't the slightest bit of use him going into business and being successful in business. That wasn't the way you became a bigger man in the Old Testament. There was only one way you could enlarge your coast.

You had to take your sword and go and take something away from the enemy. And so when Jabez prayed, make me a bigger man, he was really asking God to make him a victorious believer. Make me a blessed man, make me a bigger man, and make me a bolder man.

Oh, he said that your hand might be with me. Well, that's a mighty big hand to have with you. You remember the story of Elisha and the Widow? When he finally found this woman and introduced himself as the prophet, and she said, yes, I have heard about you.

I've got a room for you upstairs. It's not bed and breakfast, you know, she said. I can't afford to feed you.

You have the room. I can't afford to feed you. All I've got is a handful of meal in a barrel.

And that's for me and my son. I don't know what you're going to eat, mister, but you're welcome to the room. I didn't bother Elijah, you see.

It all depends whose hand is full. And it so happened it was the hand that holds the prairie. That's a big hand.

Jabez said to God, he said, oh God, please, let's hold hand, that your hand might be with me. When I'm preaching sometimes, I will notice a couple sitting towards the back. No comment on all these empty seats up front.

I don't see very well. You may have noticed me swapping glasses from time to time. I have one pair of glasses all the better to see you with.

And another pair of glasses all the better to see this book with. And I usually put them on when I'm preaching because they're much better view. But sometimes, you know, you can't help but notice, and there's a couple sitting toward the back, and what they're doing, really, they're holding hands under the hymn book.

Now, that doesn't bother me a bit, but I've noticed something about a young couple who want to hold hands under the hymn book. They don't let two or three people get in between them. You've got to sit real

close if you're going to hold hand.

So when Jabez said to God, oh God, he said, let's hold hands. He was really saying to God, oh God, I don't want anybody to get between us. And I don't want anything to get between us either.

I just want to be close so that we can hold hand. And then no foe can daunt me and no fear can haunt me. Just so long as we're holding hands.

And last of all, he said to God, I want you to make me a better man. Keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me. Oh God, he said, we're living in a very dirty world.

It's a filthy world. It's a wicked world. And if I get involved in any of that kind of thing, I know what will happen.

It'll end up breaking my heart. And I want you to keep me from it. Keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me.

And it says that God granted him that which he requested. Now, if you want to know how God did that, you have to go back to the beginning of the book. And you have to read, starting in chapter 1, verse 1, and you have to read 54 verses of name.

Then you have to go on reading chapter 2, and you read another 54 verses of name. And if you haven't given up, you'll come to verse 55. And it mentions the families of the scribes, which dwelt at Jabez.

You must remember, of course, that the books of Chronicles were written by Ezra, the scribe. That after the Babylonian captivity, the Jews who came back to drive a stake into the promised land and await the coming of the Christ. They had no kings.

The priests didn't amount to very much. There was barely a prophet ever raised his voice when they were back in the land. The most important people in the country were the scribes.

They were the aristocracy and the intelligentsia. They were the opinion makers and the rulers. The men who made the decisions and ran the country.

And apparently, this man Jabez made such an impact upon his generation that they said one to another, we must never forget him. What we must do is build a city. And we must populate that city with the scribes, the intelligentsia.

We must make it a university city. And we'll call it Jabez. So I'm quite sure the day came in the life of this man when he thanked God for the day.

He not only discovered the nature of his problem, but how that problem could be solved. Shall we pray? And so, Lord, we thank you for a man who had a problem that found its answer. And we're going to ask you to make him a blessed man.

And to make him a bigger man. And to make him a bolder man. And to make him a better man.

And we do pray if some of your people here tonight have problems, insoluble, seemingly without any pattern or any sense whatsoever, we pray that they might find the answer to that problem in yourself and in your book. Until you bring them to the place where they thank you for ever letting them have it in the first

place. For we pray in Jesus' name.

Amen. That having heard your word this Sunday evening, and perhaps sometimes we may feel just like Jabez of old, we pray that we might learn the lessons so very well. That we might come to you and believe that in your word and in your son that we will find the answer to the problems we face.

We pray, our Father, that having met the Savior tonight and having discovered that he is the Christ of every crisis, we pray that we might never fail to thank him for all that he means to each of us. Granted, day by day, we might find out with increasing measure something of the greatness, the bigness, the largeness of that loving heart. And so, Father, we pray now as we leave your house that we will take something of the fragrance of these precious moments into the evening hour.

Grant us we meet with people outside. Grant us something of the beauty of Christ might be shining from our hearts and our lives.

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