Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

To teach us how to pray for our physical needs, Jesus taught us to pray, “*Give us each day our daily bread*.” And that served the church well until the year 2000. For it was in the year 2000 that Bruce Wilkinson’s Book, ‘The Prayer of Jabez,’ became the latest craze in world-wide Christianity. It quickly became the #1 bestseller all over the place, and you could by all sorts of Prayer of Jabez merch, and he travelled the world giving Prayer of Jabez conferences. In the book, Wilkinson said,

*I want to teach you how to pray a daring prayer that God always answers. It is brief — only one sentence with four parts… but I believe it contains the key to a life of extraordinary favour with God.… In fact, thousands of believers who are applying its truths are seeing miracles happen on a regular basis.*

And the book was written as if the author had discovered some long buried key from the caves of the Old Testament that truly unlocked God’s vault of blessing for Christians. Its central claim was that if you prayed this prayer, exactly as it is written, many times a day, God would flood your life with miracles and blessings. The book includes testimonies of people who have been “praying the prayer” for any number of years. “Bruce,” says one man, “I heard you preach the message of Jabez fifteen years ago, and I haven’t stopped praying it. The change has been so overwhelming I have just never stopped.”

So, have we been missing something, all these years? Have we foolishly only asked for daily bread when we could have been asking for daily pizza and perfect health and promotions? Is praying the Prayer of Jabez the secret to unlocking the blessings of God? Well, to answer those questions we will consider the Prayer of Jabez. And I don’t mean the book, I mean 1 Chronicles 4:10!

And we do this, first and foremost, because it is Scripture, which means that it was given for our instruction and edification, and because we should assess popular movements in the wider Christian world, but mostly because, as we shall see, the Prayer of Jabez does contribute something to our understanding of the Lord’s Prayer. And we are going to see all this as we basically do a Bible study together. And there will be three main parts to our Bible study, which I will introduce as we progress through the sermon.

1. So, as with any decent Bible study, what is the first thing that the first thing to consider once we have read the text? The **context**.
   1. And here are a couple of sayings about Bible study and context that you might have heard before: Number 1 – **Context is king**! Number 2 – **A text considered apart from its context usually becomes a pretext**. And what this means is that if you take a verse or a phrase in Scripture and pay no attention to the context, then you can make it say whatever you want it to say. For example, one comedian said he had found proof in the Bible that men will be allowed into heaven around 30 minutes before women. His proof? Revelation 8:1, which says, “*There was silence in heaven for about half an hour.*” So, once we have read our text, we must consider the context.
      1. Now, before we do that, I want you to know that this is the only reference to Jabez and his prayer in the whole Bible! So, we can’t loom up other references or examples for context. And that should already make us cautious about building a whole philosophy of prayer from this one mention!
      2. But we find this one mention in **1 Chronicles 4**. 1 Chronicles is Old Testament. It is a record of the time of the Kings of Israel. And 1 Chronicles begins with the genealogies of the twelve tribes of Israel, and especially of King David.
         1. Do you boys and girls know which tribe David was from? The tribe of Judah. And that is important because it was prophesied of Judah that kings would come from that tribe, ultimately, including the King of kings – the Lord Jesus Christ.
      3. Well, chapter 4 records the descendants of Judah. And in this chapter, we are told about a man named Jabez. Notice, though, that we are **not told who his father was or who his sons were**, even though we are in a long list of fathers and sons. He just appears!
      4. And there are many theories as to why this is the case and who Jabez was and when he lived. And you know, having read these theories, the one that seems the most likely to me is that Jabez was **not even Jewish**! There is no notice of father and son

as there are with the other names here.

* + - 1. And I say that because what we are told about Jabez is that He “*called upon the God of Israel*.” And that is not a particularly noteworthy thing for a Jew to do, but it is for a Non-Jew.
      2. His name also sounds like the Jewish name for ‘pain.’ It is similar but different. So, it could be that he was not born Jewish but became one.
      3. And because he asked that his borders be enlarged, and that a bit further down we read about Othniel and Caleb, he **probably lived during the time of the Judges**. So, he would have been a kind of a male version of Ruth, who was a Moabitess or a Gentile, who came to believe in the God of Israel. And this is what made Jabez famous and so well-known among the original readers of 1 Chronicles. He was just one of the figures from history that parents told their children to imitate; be like Jabez!
    1. And if this is the case, like Ruth, Jabez’ knowledge of God would have been very limited. But he had learned about the God of Israel, and he believed in him and prayed to him.

1. So, now that we have considered the context, what should we do as the second part of our Bible study? Look closely at the **text** itself.

* 1. And what we are told in **verse 9** is that Jabez’ “*mother called his name Jabez, saying, "Because I bore him in pain."*” Now, this name could be about sorrow for having recently lost her husband as some speculate or the actual physical pain of giving birth. In Jabez’ prayer, he prays that the Lord would keep him from “*harm*” and “*pain,*” which is a clear reference to his name, but the marginal note says that “*harm*” could also be translated as “*evil*.” So, naming him like this suggests a kind of superstitious way of thinking: If this was how his life began then it will probably be the case that his life will be full of pain. And if that is the case, you can imagine that making quite an impact on you as you grow up – Mum thinks I am unlucky. In fact, she has given me a name to prove it! I mean, can you imagine growing up with a name like ‘nothing but trouble’”!
  2. Well, this clearly made a deep impression on Jabez, but he found a solution! For in **verse 10** we read that he “*called upon the God of Israel*.” And this seems to be the characteristic of Jabez that made him so well known in Israel. “*He was more honourable than his brothers*,” because he“*called upon the God of Israel*.”
     1. And broadly speaking, this means that Jabez **was a believer**.
        1. At the end of Genesis 4, after reading about Cain murdering Abel, we read about the godly line of Seth. It says, “*To Seth also a son was born, and he called his name Enosh. At that time people began to call upon the name of the LORD*.”
        2. **Joel 2:32** says, “*Everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved*.”
        3. And **Romans 10:9** echoes this truth: “*For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."*”
        4. So, to call upon God is to believe in Him as your God and Saviour.
     2. But more narrowly, what this tells us is that Jabez was a man of worship; a man of religious devotion; **a man of prayer**!
  3. And let’s remember that Jabez **probably did not grow up in a covenant home**. He would not have had an Old Testament. He wouldn’t have had instruction in all of the sacrifices and ceremonies of the Old Testament, or the Psalms of the Old Testament to learn from and imitate. But somehow he came into contact with the people of Israel and learned about this One God who created the world, and His promise that one of the descendants of Eve will crush the head of the serpent. And he would have started to learn about offering sacrifices, like Abel and Abraham did, and that we pray to God for His blessing and try and live according to His law. That is pretty much everything about Jabez’ religion! But it was enough to convince him to believe in this God and to call on him in prayer.
  4. So, with that in view, let’s look at **Jabez’** **prayer**: “*Oh that you would bless me and enlarge my border, and that your hand might be with me, and that you would keep me from harm so that it might not bring me pain!*” And then we read that “*God granted what he asked*.” So, the **five parts** of the prayer of Jabez are: First, he addressed his prayer to the God of Israel, second, he asked for blessing, third, he asked that his borders would be enlarged, fourth, he asked that God’s hand might be with Him, and fifth, he asked to be kept from harm and pain.

1. So, now we are ready for the third and last part of our Bible study. And another important principle of Bible study is to **interpret Scripture with Scripture**. So, we look for other passages in the Bible that speak about the same things in our text. And that is what we will do with the remainder of our time – we will; briefly think about the five parts of the Prayer of Jabez in the light of other Scriptures, and especially the Lord’s Prayer.
   1. So, first of all, Jabez addressed his prayer to the God of Israel. And we don’t need to say much here because we looked at exactly this in relation to how the Lord’ Prayer begins – “*Our Father in heaven*.” Through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Supreme and sovereign and almighty God of creation and providence has become our loving Father in heaven. **Matthew 7:11**: “*If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him*!” So, we too must call upon our Father in heaven in prayer trusting that He is able and willing to give us what we need.
   2. But while the prayer of Jesus teaches us to ask for “*daily bread*,” Jabez asked for blessings and enlarged borders and for the hand of the Lord to be with Him and to be kept from harm. And the Lord “*granted what he asked*”! This is why I called this sermon Give us each day our daily … pizza? Was Jabez right to ask for all of this? May we ask our Father in heaven for material blessings and good health and success? And the answer, from Scripture, is Yes, with conditions!
      1. I just read out to you **Matthew 7:11**: “*If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him*!” And those words come after the Lord’s prayer where Jesus taught is to ask God for our daily bread, and a long discussion about material things like food and clothing. So, we may ask God for material blessings. But listen to the conditions that Jesus laid out:
         1. Jesus said, “*Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also*.” So, our priority must not be material blessings.
         2. And Jesus also said, “*Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you*.” So, unbelievers think about and pursue material things, like food and a new house and promotion, because this life is all they have. But that is not how it should be with us. As **Colossians 3:2-3** says, “*Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God*.”
         3. So, heavenly things should be our priority. But we need food and clothing and shelter in order to be able to serve the Lord well. And it may even be that getting over an illness or getting a promotion will open up opportunities for us to serve the Lord. So, we may ask for those things and God has promised to give us what we need. But whatever we ask for from the Lord is not about the thing itself but about how we might use it to serve Him. Do you see the difference? To ask for a promotion just because you want a promotion and a pay rise is not right. But to ask for a promotion, which may come with a pay rise, is fine, if you want it to be about serving the Lord in that new position, and using your wealth to be a blessing to others. Because then, if you do not get the promotion, your world will not fall apart because you know that you are where the Lord wants you to serve Him now.
      2. We see this also in relation to Jabez’ request that the Lord would **enlarge his borders**. In the prayer of Jabez’ book this is all about getting rich. But remember when Jabez lived – at the time of the conquest of Canaan. And what had God promised to do then? To drive out and destroy the Canaanites; to enlarge the territory of the people of Israel. So, Jabez was simply asking God to do what God had promised already to do! This was not Jabez just wanting to get rich! He wanted the knowledge of God and the worship of God to become more and more widespread in the Promised Land.
         1. What does that look like for you and me? Well, it is to pray, Father, “*Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven*.” Make me more obedient to your will.
         2. It is to pray for personal growth in godliness: **2 Peter 3:18**, Father, help me “*grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*.” **1 Peter 2:1-2**, Father, help me to “*put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. Like newborn infants, [to] long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it [I] may grow up to salvation*.”
         3. It is to pray for more churches to be planted in New Zealand, and for the success of overseas missions!
         4. And for all of this to happen, we need our daily bread!
      3. And then, in relation to Jabez’ request that the **hand of the Lord would be with Him**, think of the lines in the Lord’s Prayer that go, “*Lead me not into temptation, but deliver me from evil*,” and “*for yours is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, forever and ever*.”
         1. So, just like Jabez, we surely want the care and protection of the Lord who is able to protect us from temptation and evil. So, we may ask for health and strength and life, but again, we ask for it so that we can serve Him and that His name would be glorified in and through us.
         2. And, if we should ever **become ill or disabled in some way**, we need to understand that this is not a sign of the Lord’s displeasure, but how we can best serve Him. And in that way, we do not buy in to the mistaken idea of many professing Christians, which is that believers are entitled to health and prosperity, and that anything else makes us lesser Christians. That is a wicked mentality!
         3. And one thing we should all know is that the day will come when the work that the Lord has assigned for us will be finished and He will withdraw His hand of protection, and we will die, and be received into His glorious presence. So, our prayer should be like Paul’s in **Philippians 1:21**: “*For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain*.” So, brothers and Sisters, we should not fear death. And we need to hear this, today. Whether it is Covid or diets or exercise, our world, and, sadly, many Christians, are obsessed with living. They spend bucketloads of money and countless hours with peak health and staying alive. And this is not to suggest that exercise or diets are wrong, but what are you seeking first – the kingdom of heaven? Do you truly view dying as gain?
      4. But Jabez also asked that he might be kept from harm and pain. And as one commentator has put it, he was basically saying, Lord, I don’t want to be **a man of sorrows**. And it may be that Jabez’ life was relatively free of pain and harm. But there would have been some pain and harm, and eventually he died, as we do we all. But he was then received into heaven and not condemned to hell, where there is only harm and pain and evil. So, people of God, the ultimate answer to this request of Jabez is the Lord Jesus Christ. **Isaiah 53:3** describes Jesus as “*a man of sorrows*.” On the cross, He endured the harm and pain and evil that the sins of Jabez and our sins deserved, so that we might receive the forgiveness of our sins and eternal life. And that should be what we want from God, more than anything else!

So, congregation, by way of conclusion, the sadness about the Book ‘*The Prayer of Jabez*’ is that it reduced the prayer to a kind of magic formula – if you pray exactly these words, over and over again, God will give you prosperity and amazing miracles! That is so tragically wrong and it has done a lot of damage in the church! As one reviewer said, sadly, the success of the Prayer of Jabez book tells you more about the state of much of the wider church than it does the value of the book. God is not a genie in a bottle who we can manipulate to get what we want by praying a certain way. He is our Almighty and loving Father in heaven who has promised to give us our daily bread and every spiritual blessing in Christ. That is the rich and biblical lesson of the Prayer of Jabez! Amen.