

IT Matters – More Than a Name

5/10/26

Jabez – 1 Chronicles 4:9-10

Sunday AM

Have you ever heard the phrase – **God helps those who help themselves**? It's in the book of hesitations. Which btw – is NOT in the Bible – yet many think it is.

There's another saying I often hear said that's equally untrue – **God is in control!** Is He really?

Okay – so biblically speaking, God is ultimately in control in that He is sovereign over all – thus, nothing surprises Him, threatens Him, or escapes His ultimate authority – and nothing occurs outside of His purview. Yet at the same time, God has created a world that b/c of the fall has real human choices, real spiritual warfare, and real consequences.

So, when people say – **God is in control** – they're often speaking more loosely than the Bible does. They're mistakenly saying – *nothing bad can happen*, or *my choices don't really matter*, or *I can just wait on God instead of acting*, or *whatever happens is God's will*.

But this isn't how the Bible says life works in a fallen world. The Scripture says believers can be tempted by the flesh, opposed by the world, and deceived by Satan – and that we're all capable of grieving the Spirit, denying truth, and making catastrophic decisions – all w/in the sphere of God's sovereignty.

After all, David didn't commit adultery/murder b/c God took control of him. Neither did God force Judas into betrayal – or Ananias/Sapphira to lie. Each of these decisions were by human choice that came w/ real consequences – and yet – not one of them compromised God's ultimate purposes.

This is the tension: God's sovereignty doesn't limit or eliminate human agency; it governs over it.

Meaning – God is ultimately in control, but He doesn't always (even though He could) exercise immediate controlling influence over human decisions. God has the ability to sovereignly permit what He doesn't morally approve – it's called God's permissive will.

This isn't to say that – God has surrendered His throne – instead, while sovereign over all, He allows us the freedom of limited choice to *obey, rebel, love, resist*, and *suffer* the consequences. He allows our human *appetites, ambitions*, and *actions* to drift away from His will for our own *wants, whims, wishes*, and *will*.

This is where the tension becomes deeply personal... b/c ambition itself isn't the enemy. God created us to *build, lead, pursue, influence, create*, and *serve*. The problem isn't that we have ambition but that our ambition too often is for ourselves instead of for God.

SP – there are (2) kinds of ambition – personal, self-glorify ambition and humble, holy ambition.

Personal ambition is driven by *ego, pride, control*, and *self-glory* that runs independently ahead of God, and even against God – only wanting – **my will be done**.

While holy ambition kneels before the Lord, trusting in Him, and humbly asking – *Lord, enlarge my influence only if You remain at the center of it*.

Well, tucked in the middle of God's cure for insomnia in 1 Chronicles 4 – in the genealogy of Ezra we find the prayer of Jabez. In case you've missed it, like a drumbeat, Ezra is sharing name after name and one beget after another until suddenly – the rhythm breaks. For right in the midst of all those begets – God pauses – but not for a

king, or a prophet, but for a prayer from a man named Jabez. Call it merciful intermission, yet we learn something powerful: ***God hears and responds to the prayer of the humble/holy ambitious.***

Jabez was more honorable than his brothers. His mother had named him Jabez, saying, "I gave birth to him in pain." Jabez cried out to the God of Israel, "Oh that you would bless me indeed and enlarge my territory! Let your hand be w/ me, and keep me from harm so that I will be free from pain." And God granted his request. 1 Chronicles 4:9-10

In Jabez, we discover a man whose life began in **pain** as pain was the banner written over his life from birth – **yet it wasn't to be his destiny.**

For instead of accepting this declaration, he sought something greater. Jabez didn't settle for the ordinary when he could have the blessing of an extraordinary God. ***He didn't allow his heritage to determine his destiny.*** He decided faith would be his guide.

As a result, Jabez surrendered his life to discovering God's heart/will. **He wanted God's best instead of the least/leftovers** and he wasn't willing to live contently w/ what he could achieve on his own – he wanted more. **He wanted the God-more!**

To be clear – the **God-more** isn't about asking God for a bigger life or more stuff – it's about surrendering to a deeper trust in God. It's the shift from pursuing what God can give to pursuing who He is – and trusting that when He becomes the priority, everything else will find its proper place.

Apparently, this is what Jabez desired. His ambition was to experience God MORE. So, he did the only thing he could do to experience God's best. He abandoned himself completely to the glory of God as he sought the will of God thru prayer.

But who was Jabez? Truth is, we're given no résumé, no accomplishments, no backstory beyond two details: he was more honorable than his brothers, and he was marked from birth by pain.

This is what makes his story so compelling b/c everything we learn about Jabez isn't about what he achieved, but about how he sought the Lord – teaching us about what God does w/ ordinary people who are willing to seek Him w/ a holy ambition.

Before we step into his story, we need to wrestle w/ a word that's at the heart of Jabez' prayer – **ambition.**

ambition – from a cultural perspective is celebrated as the *drive to achieve, succeed, and to build* something meaningful so we can rise above the ordinary. It begs us to climb higher, get more, and become something.

While there's nothing inherently wrong w/ this desire, cultural ambition is often self-directed, fueled by comparison, sustained by control, and centered on personal elevation. It's often measured by who gets the **cash**, who gets the **credit**, and who gets **control**.

Biblical ambition is different. It's not about self-glory, but stewardship. It's about giving God the credit.

Think about the parable of the talents – the master expected increase, not for the servant's glory, but his own. So, for the (2) who doubled what they had, the Master said – *well done*; while to the one who hid his talents, he called – *wicked*. Why? b/c the first (2) had ambition for the master's benefit while the other guy only had ambition for himself.

This parable reframes ambition to say that biblical ambition isn't the pursuit of personal greatness but the surrendered pursuit of God's will/glory. Instead of who gets the *cash*, *credit*, and *control*, Godly ambition asks – how am I *stewarding* the cash, *servicing* to give God the credit, and *surrendering* control to Him.

LME – cultural ambition says – *God, bless what I'm doing* – while godly ambition says – *God, I'm Yours – do whatever You want w/ me for your will and glory.*

This is exactly what we see in Jabez. He was a man who dared to want more, but not for himself – but for God – b/c *it's never wrong to want more – if more means more of God.*

Now – as we step into his story, we're told that Jabez was more honorable than his brothers, yet his mother named him out of **pain**. In the ancient world, names weren't casual labels; they were declarations of identity/destiny. So, every time his name was spoken, it reinforced a narrative of sorrow and struggle. Imagine living under that banner, constantly hearing pain spoken over your life.

But Jabez's big, hairy, audacious prayer presses against this reality to remind us that our past, nor the labels of people, don't have to determine our future. Or as it's been said – *don't let what's been spoken over you override what God wants to do thru you.*

Oh, that you would bless me indeed and enlarge my territory! Let your hand be w/ me, and keep me from harm so that I will be free from pain." And God granted his request.

In his prayer, we learn 4 truths about Godly ambition:

I IT Matters – We Ask to be **BLESSED**

When Jabez asked – *God to bless him* – he wasn't asking for comfort/ease, but for true transformation. He was asking God to intervene in his life so that his future would stand in contrast to his past.

I think Jabez recognized that **God can't fully bless what He doesn't fully own** – and this is at the heart of this prayer – surrender.

Wilkerson wrote – *Jabez dared to ask God for more, and God answered.* And what's striking is God wasn't offended by the size of his request – He was honored by it b/c when we ask God for more of what He desires, we're not elevating ourselves – we're expressing faith in who He is and surrendering to His best for us.

II IT Matters – We Aspire to be **BIGGER**

When he asked God to *enlarge his territory*, he wasn't asking for **status**, but for **stewardship**. He was asking for greater influence w/in God's purpose.

Essentially, he was praying – *God, make my life count.* Jabez wasn't asking for something he could achieve on his own, he was asking God for something that would require God's intervention. And this is the difference – ***faith-filled ambition always reaches beyond our ability to depend on God's ability.***

SEE – God doesn't enlarge our lives to make us comfortable, but to make us useful.

God is looking for people thru whom He can do the impossible – what a pity we plan only the things we can do by ourselves. A. W. Tozer

III IT Matters – We Appeal to be **BOLDER**

Jabez also understood something many of us miss – influence w/out intimacy is dangerous. So, he prays – *Let your (open) hand be w/ me...*

The hand of the Lord is an ***anthropomorphism*** for the *presence, power, and provision* of God.

It's interesting that Jabez specifically asked for God to be open-handed w/ him. Some scholars suggest Jabez is asking God to be generous while others suggest that it refers to God be willing/present – like a young child reaching out to take the hold of a parent's hand – Jabez is asking God to take him by the hand to guide him.

When all of my kids were young, there was a number of moments when I would take them by the hand to guide them - and they would take me by the hand to lead them. In both instances there was comfort to my kids that dad was there and present w/ them.

Listen – Jabez wasn't asking God to make it easy, but instead to be present and to offer guidance b/c ***God has to be more than an appendage to our faith and life.***

IV IT Matters – We Aim to be **BETTER**

Jabez wasn't fixated on his pain, he was focused on God. When he prayed – *keep me from harm* – he revealed something deeper – that the greatest threat to our future isn't what happens to us, but what happens in/thru us. He understood that if his life was going to expand, his character had to grow w/ it.

This brings us to the deepest tension in the story – pain. What did Jabez do w/ the pain that marked his beginning? Instead of using it as a stumbling block or excuse – he surrendered it to God to allow it to become a stepping stone/motivation toward something greater.

Truth is – pain has a way of shaping/breaking us, but it doesn't have to define us. It can harden us into bitterness or refine us into something better – and Jabez chose the latter. He wasn't just asking God to change his circumstances; he was asking God to change him – to make him better for God's glory.

Rick Warren wrote – *God can't use anyone greatly until they've been broken.* Why? B/c brokenness empties us of self-reliance and opens us up to God-dependence stripping away the illusion we're enough on our own. It's b/c *the God who emptied Himself has a hard time using a man who is full of himself.*

This is the tension. As long as we're full of our plans, our pride, and our control, there's little room for God to work. But when life breaks us – and pain humbles us – it creates space for God to work in/thru us.

Bruce Wilkerson tells the story of a Roman gladiator in the Coliseum –, weapon dropped, lion charging, running for his life. The caption reads – *Sometimes you can afford to come in second... sometimes you can't.*

This is the urgency behind Jabez's prayer. He wasn't just asking for protection, but transformation. Like Jacob, he wanted freedom from the pain tied to his name. In essence, he prayed: *God, don't let me live up to my past but to Your plan. Make me better, not bitter.*

Maybe that's the invite for us today. To stop settling for selfish, personal ambition but instead, to set our ambition fully and humbly on the Lord.

I love the way his story ended – *and God granted his request.* No explanation. No elaboration. Just an answer. **Why?** It's b/c God delights in prayers of holy ambition that align w/ His will/ambition for our lives.