***It Would Take a Miracle***

**…For My Life to Get Better**

**1 Chronicles 4:9-10 / January 8, 2017**

 Have you ever heard or said the expression “It Would Take a Miracle?” People use that expression in a variety of ways—to describe someone in poor health, a troubled marriage, a financial reversal and even a ball game if their team is behind. They say this when they are looking ***at*** an impossible situation and they realize that they need something supernatural to happen. In order words, they need a miracle. And, that maybe where some of you are today.

 But, the question is: Do you believe in miracles?

 According to a **NEWSWEEK** poll, most Americans believe in miracles. In fact…

* + **84** % of adult Americans say they believe that God performs miracles and nearly half
	+ **48**% report that they have personally experienced or witnessed one.

Most Christians would say they pray for miracles, and Newsweek declares:

* + **43**% of nonbelievers say they have asked for God’s intervention.[[1]](#footnote-1)

 So, where do you fit in? Do you really believe that miracles really happen? When you study the Bible, you will see that

**The miracles of the Bible are clustered around three time periods**:

* + **The times of Moses and Joshua**,
	+ **Elijah and Elisha**, and
	+ **Christ and the apostles** (all eras of new revelations from God).

 We also know that in the

* **Days leading up to the return of Christ,**

God will intervene in an increasing manner so that people will see His mighty power. I believe that we are in those days now.

 Here’s what we know. The Bible is a book about real people like you and me who live in a real world into which God unmistakably enters from time to time. I believe that ...

**God performs miracles for three reasons:**

* + **To display His power**
	+ **To help His people**
	+ **To expand His influence in the community**

 Miracles were not a regular occurrence in biblical times, but they did occur in times of need ... In desperate times. It has been said that “Desperate situations require desperate measures.” There have been times in my life that I believe that I was placed in desperate situations so that God could reveal his power in my life. Could that be where you are today?

 Today, we are beginning a brand new series, It Would Take a Miracle. Over the next several weeks, we are going to ask God to open up our eyes and allow us to see what he is doing in our community; to get the junk out of our lives and to fill us with His Spirit. To help accomplish this, we are asking you to join us in prayer for the next 21 Days.

 Together, we are going to seek the Lord. We are going to pray big prayers. Is there anything that grips your heart that is so big that when you begin to pray for it, you pray, “God, if you don’t, it won’t. If you don’t come through, it’s not going to happen. God, I am not going away until you do this?” Is there anything that you pray for with passion? I want to challenge you to join with me and let’s take the next step in learning how to pray effective prayers.

 Too many times, my prayer sounds like this: God bless me. God, where’s my keys. God help her and help him. God bless this food. Thank you for the day and give me sweet dreams and on and on and on … AMEN. Does your prayer life sound like that? Over the next 21 Days, I want to challenge you to pray for something that is BIG.  **I want you to pray for something that is so big that it cannot happen unless God makes a way.**

Today, I want to introduce you to a man in the book of 1 Chronicles named Jabez. There’s not much on him in the Bible.

In 1 Chronicles 4, you find a couple of sentences about him in the middle of a bunch of genealogies. In the first nine chapters of 1 Chronicles it’s one list of names after another. There are over 600 different names listed in those first nine chapters.

Yet in the middle of 600 names, God singles out one man for special recognition. He’s like a redwood tree in a forest of Bonzai’s. Of all the people of those 600 names, Jabez gets an honorable mention. There’s only two verses in this book about this man but that’s more than his contemporaries.

My question is, “***What made Jabez so special?”*** Why did he stand out? Why did God honor a man above all of his contemporaries?

When God honors a man, you know he must have done something significant. Jabez is set apart because he prayed a **big prayer**.

**1 Chronicles 4:9-10**

**9** Jabez was more honorable than his brothers. His mother had named him Jabez, saying, "I gave birth to him in pain."

**10**Jabez cried out to the God of Israel, "Oh, that you would bless me and enlarge my territory! Let your hand be with me, and keep me from harm so that I will be free from pain." And God granted his request.

We only have a brief account of this man’s life, but what we learn from it is that Jabez was a man who believed in prayer. In fact, his life was radically changed by the power of prayer. Let’s look a little closer at these two verses.

In verse 9, we are given the first clue that everything was not perfect in Jabez’s family. Notice the phrase: "Jabez was more honorable than his brothers."

We do not know how many brothers he had, but that account says something more about the brothers than it does about Jabez. When we read that he was more honorable than they, that indicates something of the dishonor that was attached to their character. Apparently, **Jabez’s** family had a **bad reputation in the community**.

What else do we see? When Jabez was born, his mother named him **"*Pain,"*** or ***"Sorrow."***

In the original language, the name Jabez means “painful.” Evidently he caused his mother so much grief when he was born that his mother named him Painful. She was discouraged and saw nothing ahead but hopeless difficulty.

When you look a little closer, you will notice that there are some things that are left out. All through the chapter these other names are the names of heads of families -- so-and-so is the father of so-and-so, etc. -- but suddenly Jabez is introduced, with **no mention of his father**; no paternity, no inheritance, no heritage are mentioned.

When you consider that these records in the Book of Chronicles were undoubtedly taken from the **official registry of the temple** you realize that here is an official account of who was who in the land of Israel. Jabez is introduced, however, not because of his father's name or anything about his father.

So, we can conclude that there was a struggle going on in the family of Jabez. They seemed to be under the blight of terrible **poverty,** for Jabez prays, **"Lord, enlarge my territory,"** i.e., increase my material possessions.

In Israel, the land had been divided among the tribes and among the families by lot, that every family had its own inheritance which was passed on from generation to generation. The law of Jubilee required that **every 50 years** any land which had been sold, or lost in any way, was to be restored to its original owner, yet here is Jabez, recorded without an inheritance, with no mention of his father's name, and with the additional information that his brothers were a dishonorable lot.

This tells us something significant about Jabez. Apparently his inheritance has been squandered by the irresponsibility and dissolution of his father, possibly gambled away, or lost in some crazy scheme.

At any rate, **Jabez's mother seems to feel hopeless, dispossessed, and gripped by very difficult circumstances**. Jabez's brothers too seem to have inherited some kind of a family trait which has rendered them a proverb of shame in Israel. We can put all that together from the clues given.

This gives us a picture of a young man who has all the **cards stacked against him**. He has an irresponsible father whose name has been dropped from the official records. He lives with shame from his brother’s actions. He does not have any property, no way to start earning a living, no way to attain to a position of honor or status in the community. **He is down on his luck**.

**Have you ever been done on your luck?** Have you ever felt like the whole world was against you? Could it be that God has you here today to be encouraged from His word?

Here’s the important point. Jabez knew where help could be found. **He knew that He could find help in prayer**.

We don’t know this, but I would believe that Jabez’s mother was probably a godly woman. You see, **someone apparently taught Jabez that there was a God, and that he answered prayer**. The prayer that he prayed was very personal. Jabez used the pronouns "me" or "my" five times in the prayer:

**1 Chronicles 4:10**

Jabez cried out to the God of Israel, "Oh, that you would bless me and enlarge my territory! Let your hand be with me, and keep me from harm so that I will be free from pain.

I think the whole key to Jabez’s life and the reason that he is mentioned in the Bible is found right here. Notice the phrase: “**Jabez cried out to God**.”

Jabez prayed. He was honored by God because of a secret prayer he prayed. His prayer was the key to his life.

When you look closely at Jabez’ prayer, you’ll see that there **are three specific requests.** I believe that your life can be blessed by embracing three prayers that Jabez prayed. If you want answers to your prayers I would encourage you to pray the same way that Jabez prayed.

**What did Jabez pray for?**

**1. Jabez prayed for God’s power in his life.**

He says, “Bless me. What do you mean when you pray, "Bless me," "Bless my children," "Bless the church. Bless the missionaries," or whatever? If you are like me, you use that phrase as a lazy way to escape thinking of anything more specific. But this phrase is often used in Scripture, and it is a proper prayer if we mean it.

So what do we mean by it? Blessing is receiving the favor of the Lord; God’s presence in our lives. It’s God’s power in our lives. **"Blessing" is drawing near to God, finding him, knowing him personally.**

To be close to God, to walk with him, to share in his life, to know his Spirit, to be filled with his wisdom and to understand his loving, forgiving heart, all this is part of "blessing," and this is what Jabez is praying for.

Somehow in this lonely, neglected boy's life there has come a deep sense of awareness that the key to life is to be loved and understood and appreciated, so this is what he is praying for. It is what we all ought to pray for.

Jabez is saying, "Lord, above all else, let me know that you are my God and that I belong to you and you belong to me." All of that is wrapped up in these words, "Bless me."

**1 Chronicles 4:10**

Jabez cried out to the God of Israel, "Oh, that you would bless me and enlarge my territory!

Notice he’s **very specific** about what he prays about. He’s saying, **I want you to give me more territory**. Literally more land.

This is a prayer for opportunity, for the restoration, in his case, of his lost inheritance, for a place to stand in the midst of the culture of his day in which he might gain some sense of status and respect.

Translated into our own terms, it means to find a way to break out of whatever may be limiting us, hemming us in and enslaving us. Some of you may feel this because you are in the grip of some habit, some attitude of mind and heart.

Some of you may feel that you are in a situation in which you have no opportunity to grow, to advance, to be fulfilled and satisfied.

If that is the case, this is the proper kind of prayer to pray, **"Lord, give me that opportunity. Let me find it. Open the door for me."** Jabez prays that earnestly because of his lost inheritance.

Jabez is praying a specific prayer. I believe that God wants you to pray specific prayers. Nothing becomes dynamic unless it becomes specific. The more specific I am in my prayers, the more quickly God’s going to answer.

Be specific. When you look at a request like this, it seems pretty selfish. It says, I want you to bless me. But evidently God approved of it because God answered it. Ambition is neither good nor bad. It’s a basic drive that you have in life. The difference is determined by your motive.

**Why do you want what you want?** God will never honor an unworthy motive.

In James, He says when you ask with wrong motives, God’s not going to give it to you. Evidently Jabez’ motives were pure and genuine because God granted his request.

From this, I think that God dares us to ask for big requests.

**James 4:2**

…You do not have because you do not ask God.

**Jeremiah 33:3**

‘Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.’

Over twenty times in the New Testament we’re commanded to ask. Jesus said, “Ask, Seek, Knock.” That spells “ASK”.

**Ephesians 3:20**

“God is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine according to His power that is at work within us.”

Stretch your imagination and let God take you further than you’ve ever gone before. Pray for God’s blessing on your life and your ministry. He prayed for God’s power.

**2. Jabez prayed for God’s presence in his life.**

More than anything else you need God’s presence in your life. He says, *“Let Your hand be with me.”*

What does he mean by that? He knows that his future may be uncertain. He wants God to guide him and protect him. All of us, at times, feel as though our future is uncertain.

We do not know what is coming down the road. We do not know what sudden, unexpected changes may occur in our lives in the next few days, months, or years.

We need God to guide us. Now this is what Jabez is praying for: "Lord, be with me. Go into the future with me. Guide me that I may know that each step of the way.

Some of you are praying for God to expand your work. Greater responsibility **requires** greater sensitivity to the Lord. When you have a large territory that means more responsibility. The bigger your family gets, the bigger your career gets, the bigger your church gets, the more problems you’re going to have, the more difficulties you’re going to have, the more relationships you must deal with. There are greater demands. There are more pressures.

Jabez says, “God, if You’re going to enlarge my territory then I’m going to need Your presence. I’m going to need You to be with me in my life. I can’t handle it without You.”

**3. Jabez prayed for God’s protection over his life.**

**1 Chronicles 4:10**

**10**Jabez cried out to the God of Israel, "Oh, that you would bless me and enlarge my territory! Let your hand be with me, and keep me from harm so that I will be free from pain."

Notice he says *“Keep me from harm so I will be free from pain.”* This is an interesting request. Why do you think Jabez prayed, *“Keep me from harm”*? I think one of the reasons is the bigger you get, the more critics you’re going to have. The larger your territory, the more borders you have to protect, the more enemies are going to envy you and the more angles you can be attacked from.

If your borders are small, you don’t have much to protect. I’ve found that the closer you grow to the Lord, the more the devil hassles you.

I think down deep inside, Jabez was afraid. He sees his weaknesses and he is not sure that he will be able to survive without help from above. Whatever it was -- and the text does not tell us -- **he knows that God is able to handle it.**

I do not think he prayed this prayer just once on a Sunday afternoon. I think that he prayed it over and over. That brings us to the last word we have here in this prayer.

**1 Chronicles 4:10**

**10**…And God granted his request.

**…And God granted his request.**

God did it. I do not think Jabez experienced any kind of special angelic appearance to reassure him. There is no account of any voice from heaven or any warming glow even from within to give him the promise that God had heard and was going to answer.

What I think probably occurred was that, as Jabez went on, he found doors opening suddenly, unexpectedly.

Opportunity was given for him to buy a little piece of land, perhaps, and to raise a crop on it. More money was given to him, perhaps, and he was able at last to restore his lost patrimony, to gain back the family inheritance.

Gradually, as he did so, he established for himself a reputation for honesty and fair dealings with others. Though his brothers had a bad name in the community, Jabez gradually earned a name of respect and honor until one day, looking back on his life, he suddenly became aware that God had answered all his requests.

God had been with him, brought him through, delivered him, opened the door and set him free.

I do not know whether this happens to you or not, but oftentimes I find that answers to my prayers come in such quiet, natural ways. Sometimes I am not even aware that they have been answered until sometime later.

There is another verse about Jabez in the Scriptures which helps us understand this. It is the only other time he is mentioned in Scripture. It is found just two chapters back, where in, Verse 55, it says:

**1 Chronicles 2:55**

and the clans of scribes who lived at Jabez:

The account then goes on to list who they were. Here Jabez is a name of a place which means that when this young man won back his property and his inheritance, it became a place where the **scribes began to study**.

Not only was he a man of prayer, but it is suggested here that he was also a man of the Word.

He understood the Scriptures: It was through them he learned to pray; it was there he learned about the God of Israel; it was there he learned what he might expect from this God, and what promises were given to him. **Jabez established a school of training in the Word of God for young men and women.**

Here at Jabez was the training school of these scribes who were to be the prophets to go out and teach the Scriptures in the various villages and places of the land of Israel. This is a beautiful picture of how God answered this young man's prayer. God answered his prayers in very practical ways.

 I believe that we create the future through prayer. God is giving us an opportunity to be a part of what He is doing in this community.

Today, we are beginning our annual **21 Days of Prayer and Fasting.**

For twenty-one days, are going to call on the name of the Lord, we are going to repent, we are going to get rid of the junk in our lives and we are going to listen to the Lord’s promptings.

 **So how are we going to do this?** Beginning tomorrow, the church will be open at **6:00 AM** for individual prayers. You can come and go as you need too.

 At **7:00 AM**, we will gather for a group focus. We will have worship. There will be a devotional and then a time of focused prayer. If it is does not work with your schedule, then carve out a time during the day that works for you. Find a private place where you can connect with God.

 Some find it in the early hours of the morning; others find it late at night. Carve out time, find a place and draw near to God.

 Each **Saturday** during the 21 Days of Prayer, we will be gathering for prayer at 9:00 AM. Some of you cannot make it during the week, but you can on Saturday. Be here at 9:00 AM.

* **Fasting**

 In the Bible, leaders often encouraged times of **fasting** along with seasons of prayer. Prayer connects us to God and fasting disconnects us from the world. It’s about denying yourself in order to gain spiritual strength.

 Many of you grew up in traditional churches where you would have times prayer and fasting during **Lent** leading up to Easter. This is the same concept just at a different time of year.

Whenever a believer chooses to begin a spiritual fast for one day or for several days, he or she makes a choice to break out of the routine in order to draw closer to God. Fasting is not a requirement. Fasting is a choice.

 There are different ways of fasting. For some of you, God may prompt you to go without food for a period of time….maybe it’s a meal or a day. For some of you, God may prompt you to restrict your diet during this time. You will step away from sweets or sodas or caffeine or meats. Be open to the Lord’s leading in this process.

 There’s a story in the **Old Testament** about a man named **Daniel** that fasted for twenty-one days and he fasted meats and delicacies. He restricted his diet to fruits and vegetables. Here’s what I want you to do … consider adding some sort of **fast** to this twenty-one days of prayer.

 For some this may mean that you step aside from Facebook or television so that you can connect with God. For others, the Lord may prompt you to give something up or pause some activity. I believe that God will honor you and bless you during this time. This twenty-one day emphasis will not change God’s heart, but it will change ours.

 Today under your seat there is a prayer guide. Take the guide out now. This is a guide to help you take your next step in prayer. You will also see a section that allows you to write down the names of people that you want God to bless during this 21 Day period. Let’s join together and ask God to save and deliver people who have lost their way.

In addition to that, we have dedicated our auditorium windows as prayer stations. If you have a friend or family member that needs the Lord, then write their first name on these windows and we will pray over them.

 One more thing, there is a prayer card in your booklet. Write down your requests and we will join with you and pray specific prayers. In a few minutes we will receive the offering. You can place these requests in the offering bag.

 We want Stevens Creek Church to be known in this community not only for the music that we sing and the messages that we share, but for the prayers that we pray.

We believe that the future belongs to people who pray. So, today, “What do you need from the Lord?” It’s time to pray.

**Closing Prayer**

1. 1. Kenneth L. Woodward, “What Miracles Mean”(Newsweek Magazine, US Edition, May 1, 2000), p. 54. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)