

Praying For True Prosperity



Please read 1st Chronicles 4 verses 9 & 10

This short narrative focuses attention on an Old Testament man of prayer, named Jabez – the name means ‘conceived in sorrow’. I have often wondered why this portion of scripture is interjected at this particular point, i.e. where chapter after chapter consists largely of lists of names – but I think that the Holy Spirit has directed it to this location to express the uniqueness of this prayer. Jabez, you will see, qualifies his object reverently – he seeks true prosperity.

In our day prosperity is generally thought of in terms of a secure home, two cars and a high bank balance etc. but here it is employed on a spiritual level meaning lasting treasure and other matters that pertain to the kingdom of God.

Notice also that he prays for himself. This is not improper if God desires that we possess these and other, material, blessings. How could any of us be a blessing to others if we are not filled with the goodness of God ourselves? It may not be known that this type of prayer has a reflex aspect. Let me now divert for a moment to give you an example of this from the book of Job: “the Lord turned the captivity of Job when he prayed for his friends” (Job 42 verse 10).

Now how did Jabez pray? First, INTELLIGENTLY – he called on the God of heaven and asked for a blessing for himself. Secondly, he prayed EARNESTLY – he exclaimed, “Oh that thou wouldest bless me indeed”: there was real passion and sincerity here. Thirdly, he prayed DEFINITELY – he knew what he wanted and how to ask God for it. Fourthly, he prayed EFFECTUALLY – we read that “God granted him that which he requested.”

On that basis let us now see what he prayed for. I think we can draw out four factors from our reading.

First, he prayed for GRACE. There is a popular acrostic on the word grace – God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense. We may not realise that we are debtors to God’s mercy and grace every day. It is His completely undeserved and unmerited favour towards us which enables us to fulfil His purposes for us and in us – be that in times of adversity or prosperity. It was His grace that enabled Moses to lead the Israelites to the Promised Land despite their murmurings. It was His grace that enabled Paul to still the anxiety of his fellow voyagers on

the journey to Rome (Acts 27) and also to bear up to his thorn in the flesh (2 Cor. 12 verse 9).

Do we always rely on the grace of God, particularly when things seem impossible? We, like Jabez, must depend on His grace to see us through each day, and it is in plentiful supply; we only have to ask.

Secondly, he prayed for GROWTH. It is a very lovely thing when a young couple receive their first child and show it to their friends – but they do not want it to remain as a baby. In due time they like to see their child grow up from infancy through childhood and on to adulthood. “Oh that thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast”, said Jabez, or in our case open up new ground for planting the word of God – and be blessed for it.

Thirdly he prayed for GUIDANCE. This is a very vital aspect of our lives. We need guidance in many areas of life today including choice of career, planning the way ahead and about the choice of a marriage partner. Also we must seek guidance generally as we live from day to day, that the Lord would keep us and direct us along His chosen path for each of us. Jabez prayed, “Oh ... that thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me!” This is a constant daily struggle as are the lusts of the flesh. So we need the divine grace of God every step of the way.

Several other scripture portions could be cited in regard to growth and guidance but I must go on.

Fourthly he prayed for GODLINESS. We read, “God granted him that which he requested”, therefore his prayer was acceptable.

St. Paul writes to Timothy, “Godliness with contentment is great gain” (1 Timothy 6 verse 6) and it is an excellent motto to follow – but as well as that, the life of God portrayed in our Lord Jesus Christ should be widely evident in our lives and characters. This will create joy and power to lead men, women and young people to a state of salvation.

Thus Jabez prayed intelligently, earnestly, definitely, and effectually – he prayed for grace, growth, guidance and godliness. This should form a good and lasting pattern on which to base our own times of devotion.

Then we shall see our coast enlarge, new ground opening up for us for outreach and witness. We shall have renewed strength and – like as with Jesus – God will also grant us all our requests. Amen.