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Bless Me Indeed: What Could Be Worse Than Hortence Waffle?

June 14, 2009

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First Chronicles 4:9-10

1 Chronicles 4:9-10, moved from obscurity to prominence because of a little book which topped the New York Times best-seller list, The Prayer of Jabez, by Bruce Wilkenson.

"5 Ashhur the father of Tekoa had two wives, Helah and Naarah. 6 Naarah bore him Ahuzzam, Hopher, Temeni and Haahashtari. These were the descendants of Naarah. 7 The sons of Helah: Zereth, Zohar, Eihnan, 8 and Koz, who was the father of Anub and Hazzobebah and of the clans of Aharhel son of Harum. 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." (Then the names continue). 1 Chronicles 4:5-10.

Jimmy Launce, who's retired now, was a well-loved radio personality on WJR here in Detroit. After all, he was the one who would call lingerie departments in department stores and ask the person on the phone if they had any "Freudian Slips." (Can you imagine being one of the women who said, "Hold on a minute that sounds familiar.") For years on WJR, Jimmy Launce had a special day he called "Hortence Waffle Day."

Hortence Waffle Day was when people would call in with the names of friends and co-workers who had unusual names. Jimmy Launce would try to get those folks on the show and find out where they got their names. He would play "Pomp and Circumstance" and read the list of names. He named the day after a plain-sounding, rather quiet woman whose name was Hortence Waffle. I called Mike Whorf to ask him, but the only one he could remember was Ima Hogg. My brother-in-law Jeff Berry grew up in Kalamazoo with Crystal Leer (of the Leer jet family) and her middle name was "Shanda." I've known some unusual ones. At two of my former two churches there was a "Candy Cane." One of them even got married and took the name of her husband, which was Sweders." And there was a lovely woman in Memphis whose name was "Happy Heckle." And that was her married name!

Much of the Bible is dedicated to names. The Book of Chronicles is basically a great big list of names. (It's good news that God enjoys writing names into His book!) It literally chronicles the history of Israel from Adam to the Babylonian captivity in 587, and King Cyrus' decree that the exiled Jews should return to their country. 1 and 2 Chronicles were originally one book (written on two scrolls) written by Ezra, a scribe and priest.

Names were vitally important to the Jews. Each year the high priest went into the Holy of Holies, in the

temple with a list of names; to ask forgiveness and atonement for the sins of the people. Interesting that today as Christians we are told our high priest, Jesus, has our names written in the Lamb's book of life. Jesus himself said "*Rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven.*" Luke 10:20.

Jesus' story of poor man Lazarus who goes to heaven and the rich man who goes to hell contains one man's name but not the other's. We know Lazarus' name. He was in heaven with God. We don't know the other man's name, though he was rich. It illustrates the point: **either your sins get blotted out, or your name gets blotted out.** One definition of hell is a place in which God himself no longer remembers who you are.

Which brings us to Jabez. Jabez had a problem worse than Hortence Waffle. His mother named him "*Jabez.*" It means "*born with sorrow,*" or "*he will cause pain,*" unwanted by his mother. Why would his mother *do* that? Was it traumatic delivery? Emotional pain? The father's abandonment or death? Whatever the case, he grew up with a name any boy would love to hate. Imagine the bullying and teasing of being unwanted. Jabez likely grew up bitter. His attitude may have *reflected* his name.

The difference with Jabez is that one day, he decided to do something about it. He didn't just whine about it. He didn't seek restitution. He didn't just go to the pastor. He took his problem to the Word of God: the Bible. (Are you studying the Bible enough to know how to take your problems to Scripture?) Jabez grew up hearing about the God of Israel who had rescued his forefathers from slavery and powerful enemies. Jabez may have read *these* words in Genesis 35:18. "*As Rachel breathed her last—for she was dying—she named her son Ben-Oni.(which means "son of my pain") But his father named him Benjamin (which means "son of the right hand").*" Why did Jacob step in with this name? Because Jacob had been there. His name meant "Cheat, or heel-grabber." And he cheated everyone around him. But then Jacob wrestled with *God* and God changed his name to Israel, which means "*He strives with God.*" After Jacob wrestled with God, Jacob asked God to bless him. Maybe Jabez saw himself in that.

Jabez prayed to God, "Oh, that You would bless me indeed, (which is what Jacob also prayed, but Jabez went on...) And enlarge my territory, That Your hand would be with me, And that You would keep me from evil, That I may not cause pain! So God granted him what he requested." (1 Chronicles 4:9-10)

Jabez prays to be blessed indeed by God. Weird. Jabez is praying for *himself*. It is selfish? No. God wants us to ask for his blessing. Now, God's blessing is about what *only God* can give. The first problem is many people think God's blessing has to do with *material* blessing. When Jesus said "*I have come that they may have life, and might have it abundantly.*" John 10:10, he wasn't talking about a big foot house. For the rich young ruler, experiencing God's blessing meant selling all he had to go with Jesus. I'm convinced, most of the time, like the rich young ruler, we walk away from the blessing. The other problem some of us have about blessing is we can't imagine *what* God would do in our lives were we to claim the blessings that God has waiting for us. Most of us *want* God, but we don't want too much God. We don't want to make major adjustments, and get weird. For some of us, it's too late! ☺

God wants to fix the world. He wants to bless it, through people like you and me. God wants to use ordinary people who believe in an extraordinary God. When was the last time you attempted something you knew would fail unless God intervened? When you experience that, you will have experienced the God of the universe working in your life. Oh God, that you would bless us indeed!

Jabez prays for God to enlarge his territory. If you are honoring God, God wants to increase your influence and your responsibility. But listen: in Israel, you could buy territory, until the Year of Jubilee, every 50 years, when debts were canceled and everything would go back to the original families. In ancient Israel you can't enlarge your territory unless you take something away from the enemy. **When was the last time you took something away from the enemy?** When was the last time you took something *back* from the enemy? Most of us are in the process of losing to the enemy, one small plot, one small habit at a time. What if today is your chance to take something away from the enemy? May God enlarge our territory!

Jabez prays for God's hand to be with him. Maybe you are like the widow Jesus saw at the temple, who gave what she had. She thought to herself "I only have a handful." But the amount you have depends on Whose hand you're talking about. If you are in *God's* hand, you are literally in touch with Divine power. **Dependence is God's plan for His most honored servants.** 2 Corinthians 3:5-6 "*Not that we are sufficient*

of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant.” Being dependent on God’s hand can feel miserable and wonderful at the same time.

Jabez prays for God to keep him from evil, that he may not cause pain. That’s not just pain for others, it includes pain for yourself as well. How many of our decisions (that go against God’s best for us) cause us pain? Evil causes pain, (that’s a blessing of God too), and when *we* entertain evil, we are asking for pain. Maybe not directly, maybe not right then and there, but we can count on evil or sin always causing pain. How sensible to pray for God to keep us from it! **The most effective war against sin is to pray that we will not have to fight.** Proverbs basically says, don’t walk away from evil, RUN! Jesus himself taught us to pray “*Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.*”

Our passage closes by with these words: God granted it. In closing let me ask, what *do* we pray for? This week, I invite you to begin to pray that this prayer daily. That God would bless you indeed. That God would increase your territory for Him. That His hand would be upon you. That you would be keep far from evil. Out of all those names, Jabez must have been transformed by this prayer. The name Jabez is mentioned only other time in the whole Bible. In 1 Chronicles 2:55 Ezra writes about “*The families of the scribes who lived in Jabez....*” The people honored Jabez by having a city named after him, a city in which the families of the scribes lived.

Imagine the world if we follow in the footsteps of Jabez. Ask God to bless you...*a lot.*

Let us pray: Almighty God, thank you blessing us. We are fully aware that we are one bad decision away from ruin, but thank you that we are also one decision and one prayer away from entering into your blessing. Bless us a lot, Lord! Bless us that we may be a blessing for others. And thank you that because of Christ our past, even the “name we’ve made for ourselves,” does not have to define our future. Let us take *our* problems to Your Word. Let us give ourselves to You who hold the Book of Life. And we praise you and bless you, Lord. Amen.