

Jabez's Model Prayer

By Dr. Joel Beeke

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Bible Text: 1 Chronicles 4:9-10
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Heritage Reformed Congregation of Grand Rapids
540 Crescent St NE
Grand Rapids, MI 49503

Website: www.hnrc.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/hnrc

Our scripture reading is from Genesis 17:1-8 and two verses in 1 Chronicles 4. Genesis 17:1-8.

1 And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect. 2 And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly. 3 And Abram fell on his face: and God talked with him, saying, 4 As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations. 5 Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee. 6 And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee. 7 And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee. 8 And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.

Then 1 Chronicles 4 and these two verses will be our text this evening, 1 Chronicles 4:9-10, remarkable verses, actually, embedded in the midst of a very lengthy genealogy.

9 And Jabez was more honourable than his brethren: and his mother called his name Jabez, saying, Because I bare him with sorrow. 10 And Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, Oh that thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast, and that thine hand might be with me, and that thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me! And God granted him that which he requested.

May God bless the reading of his word.

This evening we want to look at 1 Chronicles 4:9 and 10 as a model prayer not only for Prayer Day but also for preparatory time for the Lord's Supper. 1 Chronicles 4:9 and 10 where we read God's word as follows. "And Jabez was more honourable than his brethren: and his mother called his name Jabez, saying, Because I bare him with sorrow."

And our focus will then be on verse 10, "And Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, Oh that thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast, and that thine hand might be with me, and that thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me! And God granted him that which he requested." Our theme that is "Jabez's Model Prayer." Jabez's model prayer: its covenantal foundation, its fourfold request, and its gracious answer. Its covenantal foundation, its fourfold request, its gracious answer.

So Chronicles, as you no doubt know, is actually one book divided into two in our Bibles but originally one, and the author may well be Ezra but no one knows for sure. Some scholars think that Ezra wrote 1 and 2 Chronicles and Nehemiah and Ezra and that he was one of the major authors of the Old Testament. But be that as it may, the purpose of the book of Chronicles is not to give as thorough of a presentation of all the kings that 1 and 2 Kings gives, but to be selective. That's why Chronicles passes over Saul's kingship, passes over David's adultery with Bathsheba, passes over Absalom's rebellion against his father. The book of Chronicles, the design to view Israel's history through the lens of a kingdom of priests, it wants to show that Israel and within Israel, especially the house of David, have been called to establish and display on the earth the kingdom of God. And Chronicles does that by stressing also several themes. One of the themes is the presence of God which appears everywhere in this book. Also, the need to inquire of God, to seek God is a common theme. The heart, seeking God with a perfect heart is another part of the major purpose of Chronicles. More than the book of Kings, you see, Chronicles focuses on that personal relationship between God and the hearts of his people. This author talks about hearts being tender, hearts being humbled, hearts being broken by God's word to sinners, and how seeking God brings the seeking sinner to a position where he may find his rest in the coming Messiah.

So Chronicles intertwines the monarchy of David with God's dwelling among his worshipers, and its plot rises to a peak in the covenant that God made with David, an everlasting covenant that will culminate in the Messiah yet to be born, and so the son of David is a major theme in this book pointing to Jesus Christ as the apex of all human history. So Chronicles is a bridge, it's a bridge from creation to the new creation, from the old covenant to the new covenant, and its continuity with the New Testament and its continuation as the God of history making large steps through redemptive history is evident from the first 15 chapters consisting of 80-90% a chronology of just the line of generations. And then because it was the last book, Chronicles, in the Hebrew Old Testament, you move directly from this book full of genealogies into Matthew which begins with genealogy and takes it from that time to the time of Christ, showing the continuity between the two testaments, showing that God is a God who works through history and brings about David and his monarchy in order to come to the greater David, the Son of God and his full-fledged gospel.

So the whole history of Jabez and this wonderful prayer that he utters needs to be seen as one of those intriguing and enlightening and comforting incidences in the book of Chronicles that underscores nearly all of these themes, and Jabez models that for us in the midst of this long genealogy. It's amazing. In a long long list, the longest in the Bible of

dying people, the God of Israel, the covenant-keeping God, suddenly reveals himself as a wonderful living God to this man named Jabez.

Now we meet Jabez nowhere else in scripture. We don't know of any heroic accomplishments he's done. As far as we know, he's fought in no great battles. He wasn't a leader. He wasn't a king. We don't even know where he lived but he was apparently quite well-known. He needs no introduction here. Apparently everyone in Israel knew who Jabez was. And yet, in a way, when you see his prayer and you read what is said about him being honorable in verse 9, we feel like we know him fairly well. The Bible says he was an honorable man who was acquainted with sorrow.

"Jabez was more honourable than his brethren: and his mother called his name Jabez, saying, Because I bare him with sorrow." Now that name actually means two things. Two things. First of all, the name itself means "a son who causes sorrow." So probably, it seems his mother had him in quite a bit of pain. It was a difficult delivery, we would say. And the judgment of paradise, therefore, is felt deeply by his mother, "I will greatly multiply thy sorrow, in thy conception and sorrow thou shalt bring forth children." Some translations actually translate the name Jabez "a pain-giver." Pain-giver is really what it means literally and naming Jabez that way is similar to Rachel calling her son Benoni when she was dying of sorrow. But though Jabez was a cause of sorrow in birth, he appears to have been a great source of gladness in life. By the grace of God, this pain-giver became a joy-giver. By grace, though cradled in dark sorrow, his life was crowned with the sunshine of God's grace. The son of sorrow became a child of God. The Benoni, as it were, became a Benjamin, a son of God's right hand.

It's a beautiful name when you contrast it with what he became but, secondly, he's more honorable. Interesting words, "more honourable than his brethren." There was something in Jabez's life that stood out and everybody knew it. It didn't need detailed explanation. What was it about Jabez? Well, obviously it was something about his godliness. That's reflected all throughout his prayer. People could see in his life that Jabez was a godly man. I'd like to just mention three things.

He had a sanctified life. That's so obvious in his prayer. This is a man who experientially knew what it meant to be born again. The root of his honorableness was the sovereign grace of God from all eternity penetrating his life. Jabez, no doubt, became Jabez, a man of sorrow, when he learned about his sin before God but he also came through that honorable way of bringing his sorrow to God and finding relief and redemption in the Messiah to come. He was honorable because that work of sanctification that comes with the new birth, that comes with being made a new creation was in him, had begun in him at least.

Then secondly, he was a man of sanctified learning. We read in chapter 2, verse 55, one other small reference, the only other small reference that probably has some direct connection with Jabez. It says this, because we find "the families of the scribes dwelt at Jabez," a city or a village, probably named after him. The Jews, the ancient Jews put in their commentaries that Jabez, we have no way of proving this but that Jabez was a

famous doctor of law and that he had many followers. He was like a lawyer of lawyers and a teacher; he could teach law. And it seems by his being abruptly mentioned here, that his name was also well-known when this book was written.

So sanctified life, sanctified learning, and then, of course, the obvious one here that we have no doubt about at all, sanctified prayer. He was a man of prayer. He was a man who knew what it means to wrestle for the welfare of Zion and what a blessing, what a blessing that is. Spurgeon used to say that for every child of God is a real wrestler in the midst, everyone was worth 10. Those are valuable members of a church, valuable members of society. These are the Abraham's that know what it means to cry out, "O God, spare Sodom! Spare America in our dark and needy day!" And even a remnant of them will make a difference in world history and church history and family history. What a great benediction a wrestler in prayer is. In fact, do you know of anybody more valuable than prayer wrestlers? You know, sometimes seniors say to you, "Well, I feel like I'm retired and I'm confined in this nursing home now and I feel like I can't do much good anymore and my life is past." No, no, no, you have the most fruitful possible ministry you can imagine if God gives you the grace to be a wrestler in prayer. How could you be engaged in a more valuable task?

Let me just tell you a quick story. It happened to me. I was about one year in the ministry and I was preaching on a Sunday morning in Sioux Center, Iowa and there was an elderly woman just a couple blocks down from the church, a dear member of our church, couldn't come to church anymore, housebound all the time, in her 90s but she was a prayer wrestler. Oh, was she a dear mature child of God. Sweet and intimate with God. And I went to visit her on Monday morning and she said to me, "How did the sermon go yesterday morning for you?" And I said, "I don't know. It was very stranger. The first half of the sermon, I just had no freedom at all to preach and it seemed like halfway through, suddenly I felt the wind of the Spirit and the sermon just went wonderfully well." "Oh, I thought so," she said. I said, "Why do you say that?" "Well," she said, "I could tell. I could tell. I was listening on the church phone the first half, it wasn't going for you. I could tell. So I hung up the phone and I just spent the second half of the sermon praying for you and I thought it would go better." Oh, do you realize how endeared I felt to that woman right there at that moment? You know, John Newton said, "My most valuable friends in this world are those who lift up my worthless name and lisp it in the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth." A prayer warrior, someone who prays for you, they are your best friends on earth, and someone who prays for the nation and prays for churches and whose prayers encircle the globe like Jabez's, these individuals are the most valuable people and all this world has to offer.

Jabez, a sanctified prayer warrior. You see, these are not murmurers, as we heard about this morning, or talkers, or complainers but petitioners, wrestlers who are concerned about the glory of God's name, concerned about revival, about the growth of God's people, about the conversion of the lost, concerned about the leadership of the church receiving wisdom, concerned about ministers receiving opening and preaching, concerned about young children growing up in the fear of the Lord, concerned about Christian schools and education, and the peace of Jerusalem, and mission and evangelism

all over the world, concerned about family life being godly and about family worship, and local ministries of the church, concerned about the sick listed in the bulletin, and for the sending of more ministers into the white and ready harvest. All these prayer warriors, you see, they take the greatest needs of society and the church and the nation and families and they carry them to God's worthy throne. What a blessing one Jabez can be to a church. Are you a little bit of a Jabez? I don't think any of us would think we're a great Jabez but are these your burdens in prayer?

"And Jabez called," our text says, "called on the," who? "The God of Israel." The God of Israel. He had this wonderful foundation, this covenantal foundation under his prayer, his starting point, his point of departure in prayer is the God of Israel. That's a covenantal framework, a covenantal term, you see. God who is faithful, the God of Israel is a covenant God. He says, "I will be your God. You shall be my people." That's the way to begin, isn't that what you think, the God of Israel, the covenant-keeping God who delivered us from Egypt, from the house of bondage, who preserved Israel from the wrath of pharaoh, who led us through the Red Sea, who drowned the hosts of pharaoh, who defeated the Amalekites, who revealed his covenant grace to Israel saying, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth." The I Am of the burning bush. The I Am. The I Was What I Was, the I Am What I Am, the I Shall Be What I Shall Be. The God who changes not. This faithful God, this familiar God, this covenant-keeping God, this God who in the face of the Messiah to come delights to be prayed unto. "O God of Israel, hear my call!"

You see, we need a foundation. When we come to God, we need a foundation on which to pray and there's no better foundation than God's covenant faithfulness. That's what we sing in psalter 425 often, don't we, stanza 5, "Jehovah's truth will stand forever, His covenant-bonds He will not sever." We sing that so often when we baptize children, don't we? This is our pleading ground for those children, the God of Israel, the covenant foundation in our prayer in Jesus Christ. Well, that's our foundation for Prayer Day, that's our foundation for the Lord's Supper, for preparatory. The Lord's Supper is for people who come on that foundation, God's covenant faithfulness in and through his Son. That's our hope. That's our total hope. That's our complete righteousness in the Son of God. So in spite of all our unfaithfulness in every area of our lives, we come short, don't we, we plead the faithfulness of the character of a Triune God in the face of Jesus Christ and then, you see, we have a good foundation on which to stack our petitions one by one.

When you begin your prayer, tell the Lord how wonderful he is and build on this foundation, that he's covenantally faithful, that he's glorious, that he's worthy, righteous, worthy to be feared and loved and adored and served and worshiped. Now it's out of this foundation that Jabez, then, has this fourfold request in his prayer. The first request is, "Oh that thou wouldest bless me indeed." Jabez was looking for blessing more than anything else. He's not content to live out of the covenant of nature here for external blessings. No doubt he implies those, but he wants to live out of the covenant of grace, the foundation itself. It's as if he says, "Lord, fulfill that thou hast put gladness in my heart more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased. Bless me indeed. Bless me truly." Literally in Hebrew, "Blessing, bless me." And that repetition means,

"Bless me indeed. Bless me in truth. Bless me in the inner parts. Bless me covenantally. Bless me with the blessing of Abraham," Genesis 17 that we read to you. You see, the great blessing of the covenant to Abraham was, "I will both bless thee and thou shalt be a blessing." That's what Jabez wants. "Bless me and let me be a blessing, Lord."

Is that what you want? Is that your prayer when you get up in the morning, "God, bless me today and let me be a blessing. Bless me with spiritual peace and spiritual plenty, and spiritual prosperity, and spiritual revival, and spiritual refreshment, and spiritual sanctification. Bless me with the gift of Jesus Christ and then bless me with the gifts of his benefits that flow out of him." That's a good way to come with spiritual petitions. Begin with that one. "Oh, bless me indeed. Blessing, bless me." Hebrew, when you double something like that, you aim for the heart, you aim for it. It means like underlining it, putting it in italics. "I want the real thing, the real blessing."

And then secondly, "enlarge my coast." Enlarge my coast. So in a way, he's asking here for material things, isn't he? He first asks for spiritual depth but then he's asking for material things as well, just like the same order in the Lord's Prayer. "Give us this day our daily bread," comes after several spiritual petitions and so on. On Prayer Day, we ask for farmers to be blessed, we ask, as you heard in the prayer, that our work would be blessed this year. We ask for all kinds of outward blessings. It's perfectly appropriate even though it's secondary but it's perfectly appropriate. God promised Abraham, "In blessing, I will bless thee and I will give thee the nations of the world." It wasn't just spiritual, that was physical as well and Jabez now pleads on this covenant-keeping God of Israel to bestow upon him such blessings.

But these two first petitions, of course, are tied together and so as he prays for spiritual benediction, it's not as if when he prays "enlarge my coast," he's only thinking "give me bigger and better things in this world and prosper my work," or other things of like nature. No, no, he's also praying, praying this spiritually too, "enlarge my spiritual coast, give me more daily repentance, more a sense of my daily forgiveness, more a sense of daily communion with thee. Help me to grow in the knowledge of the Messiah." Deuteronomy 19:8 puts it this way, "the LORD thy God enlarge thy coast, as he hath sworn unto thy fathers," and the idea there was that Israel's coast would be enlarged to embrace the Promised Land of Canaan. Literally embedded in that promise, however, was ultimately the heavenly Canaan. That's why our Puritan forefathers used to say when you plead for God's blessing and plead for his promises, remember you are filing suit with God to do as he has said and to give you those spiritual and temporal blessings that he delights to shower upon his people.

And yet there's something more here. Israel was to enter into holy war, to destroy the Canaanites, and then the Lord promised to enlarge their coast and Jabez is perfectly aware, painfully aware, that many Canaanites are still in the land, especially in the land of his own heart but also literally in the land that God would give to Israel. And so when he's praying "enlarge my coast," he's actually saying on two levels, "Lord, help me to get rid of all the Canaanites inside of me. Give me strength to overcome sin, every indwelling sin, to put it to death. But also give me strength to push out the Canaanites

that are destroying the land." And you see, that's a holy war that God called Israel to fight and Jabez is grieved that Israel is not sending the Canaanites out of the land and Israel's problem was they were making peace with the Canaanites and time and time again they were flirting with worshipping and sometimes actually did worship the gods of the Canaanites and so Jabez says, "O God, please don't let this happen. Enlarge my coast in my own heart, in the nation. Help us to put away sin, the Canaanites in the land. Oh that my head," like Jeremiah cries, "were waters and mine eyes a fountain of tears that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people."

Let that be our prayer today on Prayer Day. Let that be our prayer as we come to the Lord's Supper on the next Lord's Day. "Lord, grant that this wine and bread, what it signifies and seals, may help me to be more fully devoted to Jesus Christ, to covenant back to him who covenants to me so that I may go out and put a sword through sin and live holy to thee, and reckon myself dead unto sin and alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord."

But then, thirdly, Jabez prays, "and that thine hand might be with me." That thine hand might be with me. You see, he saw that real prayer demands repentance and reformation. He feels his weakness for the battle. He knows he can't do it, he can't do it without the hand of God. He knows he can't put out all those Canaanites inside and outside without God's enabling hand, without God confirming what David said, "He teaches my fingers to war and my hands to fight. I need his hand on my hand."

Do you feel that too experientially in your life? I trust you do. You need God's hands on your hands steering the ship of your life. Remember that story, boys and girls, one of the Building on the Rock books, I think it is, where a dad showed his boy how to steer, put him behind the wheel of the ship and the boy was heading for the rocks but his dad came around behind him and put his hands over his hands and the boy was steering but the dad was the one really steering. And you see, that's what happens when the Holy Spirit enters our lives and he steers us and guides us even as we have our hand on the wheel, but he's the one, he's the one by his hand that goes with us and keeps us from self-destructing, from capsizing on the rocks.

You know, the hand of God is so great. It really is a whole sermon just in this, "thy hand." There's a whole sermon, "thy humbling hand, thy empowering hand, thy upholding hand, thy directing hand, thy converting hand, thy controlling hand, thy firm hand." The hand of God is full of metaphorical symbolism of all the benefits of salvation. "No man shall pluck thee out of my hand nor out of my Father's hand. Look at my hands and see the wounds for my friends." The whole Bible is full of it. They bound Jesus' hands in Gethsemane so that he could set his people free. "Oh that thy hand would bless me." It's so simple and yet so profound. If you're in the hand of God, in the hand of God's favor, you're safe. You're safe.

And finally, fourthly, "and that thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me." Keep me from evil that it may not grieve me. There's really two things to notice here. First, evil, the Hebrew word here is "ra" which means "affliction; adversity;

distress; grief; wretchedness." It really means, "Help me to handle all my afflictions in such a way, whatever thou art pleased to send me, help me to handle all my afflictions in such a way that I'm not grieved to the point of being overcome and overwhelmed personally but that I may profit from it and bow under it." It's really a prayer, in a sense, for submission, for grace to handle whatever God sends. It's a prayer to come to the place of Psalm 119:75, "I know, O LORD, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me." Jabez doesn't want to go his own way. He wants to be under God's hand in God's way. You see, the worst punishment God can ever give us is to let us go our own natural way. That's even worse than God's judgments upon us.

You know, we don't know what the future holds, do we? We don't know what the future of this church holds or our Christian schools or the seminary or our families, much less our nation. We don't know. The Lord could bring us into war this year. The incredible debt that we now have which has just gotten \$15,000 larger yesterday for every human being in America through \$1.9 trillion bill, will that consume us and overtake the economy? Will the economy collapse? We don't know. Will God deprive us of harvest? Will God's hand be so against us for our indifference to this horrific holocaust of abortion that he will just abandon us to ourselves altogether? Will God send death into our home this year? Will God take the truth away from us? Will the freedom of worship be denied? We've seen a bit of that last year. Or worst of all, will the Lord just leave us over to ourselves to total moral spiritual bankruptcy? We don't know but this we know, that there is peace in bowing under God and as we bow under God, we plead that whatever he sends our way won't overcome us but that we'll still worship him in true submission, that we'll as God seems to come out against us as a great enemy, that we'll embrace him as a great friend, that we'll cling and cleave to him in all that he does.

And then the second thing to notice about this petition, "that thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me," is this, that "grieve" is the same Hebrew root word as "sorrow" in verse 9. The Dutch word is "smarten" or "smarte." Verse 9 is smarten, verse 10 is smarte. And what does that mean? Well, it means that this child of pain, this child of sorrow, this child of grief brings his own name before the Lord. Matthew Poole says it so profoundly, it's as if Jabez says, "Lord, let me not have that grief which my name implies and which my sin deserves." Lift me, this year, lift me above myself, above my just desert, above the sorrow and pain of sin. Lift me higher. Lift me unto thee, from sin and sorrow set me free, free to live to thee, free to live to thy glory.

This is my prayer, Jabez would say. Four beautiful petitions all grounded in the God of the covenant. By this God we can live. By this God we can die even if he doesn't answer our prayers. But sweet prayer, true prayer, does get answered. Bishop Paul said good prayers never come weeping home. God will fulfill at his time, in his way, the petition and that's what you read at the end of the verse. It's so simple. It's so beautiful, "And God granted him that which he requested." Wow. Really? God granted all four petitions? Yes. To Jabez, unworthy Jabez? Yes. Why couldn't he do that for you? He can. He can. Ask to pray like Jabez and wait on God. Pray that God will beautifully, simply, powerfully, overwhelmingly answer your petitions as well. Jabez was blessed indeed outwardly and inwardly. He was blessed with God and by God and in God and through God. And Jabez

coasts were enlarged both temporally and spiritually. The text says God gave him what he requested. And Jabez experienced that God's hand was with him. He received strength to put the enemies to rout. And Jabez was granted true submission so that afflictions did not overwhelm him. All of this was fulfilled.

You know, we sing often, "Our hope is on Jehovah's stayed, In him our hearts are joyful made, Our help and shield is he, Our trust is in his holy name, Thy mercy, Lord, in faith we claim, As we have hoped in thee." God's a prayer-giving, prayer-hearing, prayer-answering God. God granted him. A grant is a gift. God graciously gave him in Jesus Christ whom he forsook so that he might remember Jabez. Jesus Christ went without the consciousness of these things in the closing agonies of his life so that you and I, dear believer, could receive them and Jabez too.

The whole Triune God is involved here. Through the merits and the intercession of the Son, he paves the way so that prayer can be answered. Prayer is just a wonderful cyclical experience. If you start at the top of the circle, the Father decrees all true prayer from eternity. It's then merited by the Son. The Son sends the Spirit to work it in our hearts so that we groan within ourselves, groanings that are unutterable, and our cries go back up to God but back through the Son. And the Son takes them and sprinkles them with the salt of his own suffering and sanctifies them and then presents them pure and holy to the Father who answers them. "And God granted him that which he requested." Praise the Father, praise his Son, praise the Holy Spirit.

Well, let me close this sermon with just three quick thoughts. 1. If you're a believer, keep courage. Keep courage. Wait on the Lord. Your covenant God will not desert you. Jabez towered above his brethren because he clung to the God of Israel. You can have that too. You can be an example for others through your prayer life. That may be people you don't even know but they'll see the result in your life, your result of inner peace that passes all understanding, your result of external contentment that shows you're not like the world.

2. Pray for total submission, to bow under God in all his dealings with you. Pray for growth in grace, for enlarged coast. Pray that you may be cut off in self more and more so that you may be not just ingrafted into Christ but grow through that ingrafting into him more and more and become more like him.

And then finally for those of you who don't know the Lord Jesus Christ, you need this prayer life as well and it's available. It's available. You need to pray to be kept from the greatest judgment of all, the hardening of heart. You need to see the character of God, who he really is. "I have no desire in the death of the wicked," God says, "but that the wicked will turn from his way and live." Don't become a victim of passive ungodly submission but bring your need to God. Come on the right foundation. Come with the right petitions and wait for God's gracious answer. He's willing to be your God and the God of your seed because he's a covenant-keeping God. Amen.

Great God of heaven, we pray thy benediction upon this short time together tonight and we ask that the sermons of this day may help us, help us stop murmuring and help us to

continue praying, and that our eyes may be upon thee sitting at the right hand of the Father by the Spirit, and that thy eye, intercessory Savior, would be on us, teaching us to pray, helping us to stop murmuring, helping us to know in whatsoever state we are in therewith to be content, and helping us to be a blessing in the earth, help us to be a Jabez in the midst of confusion and disarray and near despair for so many millions who are grumbling, who are angry, who are complaining. O God, give us the spirit of Jabez. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.