

**“Touching Heaven:  
A PRAYER OF BLESSING”**

**I Chronicles 4:9-10**

*God wants to bless us so we can bless others.*

A sermon preached by  
Rev. Dr. William O. (Bud) Reeves  
First United Methodist Church  
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As southerners, we know all about blessing. We bless the food we are about to eat. When we engage in hostile conversation with someone, we say we “bless them out,” or we get “blessed out,” if someone is openly critical toward us. That’s actually the opposite of blessing, isn’t it?

But the most famous of southern sayings is the use of the term “bless your heart.” These words can be used to express true sympathy, especially when you don’t know what to say or nothing you can say will fix the situation. “Your dog died? Bless your heart.” “Your mama’s in the hospital? Bless your heart.”

But many times this phrase is used as anything but a blessing. In fact, it can be a covering phrase to say anything you want to about anybody. As long as you precede or follow the statement with “bless your heart” or “bless his/her heart,” the gossip or criticism can fly. “Bless her heart, that potato salad is the worst I ever tasted.” “Bless his heart, he doesn’t have the sense God give a goose.” (One of my mother’s favorites.) Type in “bless your heart” on YouTube, and you will literally get 3 million examples of the use of the phrase.

Maybe we’re all a little confused by this idea of blessing. It seems like it ought to be connected to God somehow. How can we get a better idea of what blessing is all about?

Let’s look at a little jewel of Scripture that is tucked away into one of the most boring passages in the entire Bible. In fact, I think it’s a miracle that anyone ever found this prayer at all, because it appears in the midst of a long and tedious genealogy of Israel. The author takes a short break in the monotony to say a special word about a man named Jabez. Jabez was honored more than all his brothers, although the text doesn’t say exactly why or how. In fact, his name means “labor pain.” How would you like the other kids on the playground calling you *that* all your growing up years? You might say that he was actually cursed, called a pain by his own mother from the day he was born. Maybe as a way to cope with the difficulties of his life, Jabez had a prayer that was significant enough that the chronicler recorded it for all time:

*“Oh, that you would bless me and enlarge my border, and that your hand might be with me, and that you would keep me from hurt and harm!”<sup>1</sup>*

A prayer doesn't have to be lengthy to be great. Let's see what this powerful little prayer can mean for us today.

Understand first that **GOD WANTS TO BLESS US**. He made us; he loves us; he wants our lives to be filled with all good things. Like any good father, his desire is to see his children happy and fulfilled. Too often we get the idea that God wants our lives to be like Jabez' name—a pain! But that's not what God is about at all. God wants to bless us well and abundantly.

Our problem is not that God is lacking in desire or supply. Our problem is that we don't open up our lives for all the blessings God wants us to have. Maybe it's ignorance or lack of faith or fear, but many times we fail to realize just what God wants to do for us.

There is a famous oil field in Texas called Yates Pool. During the Great Depression of the 1930's this field was a sheep ranch owned by a man named Ira Yates. Mr. Yates wasn't able to make enough on his ranching operation to pay his mortgage, so he was in danger of losing his ranch. With little money for clothes or food, his family (like many others during the Depression) had to live on government subsidy.

Day after day, Yates grazed his sheep over those rolling West Texas hills, worrying about how he would pay his bills. Then a seismographic crew from an oil company came into the area and told him there might be oil under his land. They asked permission to drill a wildcat well, and he signed a lease contract.

At 1,115 feet they struck a huge oil reserve. The first well came in at 80,000 barrels a day. Many subsequent wells were more than twice as large. In fact, 30 years after the discovery, a government test of one of the wells showed it still had the potential flow of 125,000 barrels of oil a day.

Mr. Yates owned it all. The day he purchased the land he had received the oil and mineral rights. Yet he'd been living on relief. A

multimillionaire living in poverty. The problem? He didn't know the oil was there even though he owned it.<sup>2</sup>

Many Christians live in similar spiritual poverty. They are entitled to the all the gifts of God, but they are not even aware of their birthright.

The Letter of James says, “*You do not have, because you do not ask.*”<sup>3</sup> Jabez knew how to ask. He prayed, “*Oh, that you would bless me.*” Bruce Wilkinson, who wrote a highly successful book on the prayer of Jabez, translated this verse with a word of emphasis: “That you would bless me *indeed.*”<sup>4</sup> Not just a little bit, not just an ounce, not just enough to get by, but bless me *indeed*. Bless me a lot. Bless me by the barrel. Bless me big time. Bless me abundantly. That’s what God wants to do for you.

**GOD WANTS TO BLESS US WITH SUCCESS.** We’re not talking about cars and boats and big houses here. God wants us to have a life that is spiritually successful. He wants us to have a successful witness, a successful ministry, successful relationships with God and other people. That’s worth more than any material possession.

There’s nothing wrong with praying for success, when you’re praying for success in the will of God. You probably remember the verse from Psalm 118, “*This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.*” But do you know the verse that comes right after that? “*Save us, we beseech you, O Lord! O Lord, we beseech you, give us **success.***”<sup>5</sup>

Jabez prayed that God would enlarge his border. In that day, he was praying that God would give him more land, because success and status depended on how much territory was controlled by your family. They still feel that way in the Middle East.

Meaningful success for us is more spiritual than material. Our spiritual territory is the influence we have with other people in sharing the good things of God. If we pray that God would use us to touch more and more people with the good news of Jesus Christ, then we

will be successful. The measure of a Christian's success is not how much money you make or what you own, but how many people you touch and how you touch them.

George McCluskey was a Christian who decided many years ago to spend an hour a day in prayer for his children. He wanted them to grow up and follow Christ. As time went on, he expanded his prayers to include his grandchildren and then his great-grandchildren. Every day, between 11 a.m. and noon, he prayed for the three generations following him.

As the years went by, George McCluskey's two daughters both became committed Christians and married men who went into full-time ministry. His four granddaughters all married ministers, and his one grandson became a pastor. George's first two great-grandchildren were boys. One of them became a pastor, but the other one didn't. He bucked the family trend and pursued an interest in psychology. He earned his doctorate and wrote books for parents. He also started a radio show that was heard on over 7,000 stations around the world every day. That great-grandchild's name is Dr. James Dobson, founder of Focus on the Family. George McCluskey was not rich or famous, but through his prayers, he was very successful. God enlarged his border to include thousands upon thousands of families literally around the globe.<sup>5</sup>

We pray for God to enlarge our border, so that we might touch others more and more for him. We pray for God to increase our territory at First United Methodist Church. We are beginning discussions to expand our ministry into east Fort Smith. I believe there are great opportunities to touch more people for Christ in an additional location. I pray for God to expand our reach through our community missions, our youth, children and music ministries. I pray we would see the day when we average 700 people in worship again. Do you believe God can do that? I almost feel embarrassed praying for such a small number, but when we get there, we will pray again for God to enlarge our border.

**GOD WANTS TO BLESS US WITH POWER.** After Jabez asked God to enlarge his territory, he prayed that God's hand would be with him. In other words, he knew the only way he would achieve success would be if God helped him and provided the power to do the tasks he was called to do. I think we can see here how Jabez felt. He was powerless. His life was a pain. So he asked for the powerful hand of God to be with him. He could only be blessed if God gave him the blessing. He could only succeed if God gave him success. The power belonged to God.

In 2012, an unarmed 17-year-old named Trayvon Martin was shot and killed in Florida by a community watch volunteer named George Zimmerman. The incident ignited protests and controversy across the country. Trayvon's parents, Sybrina Fulton and Tracy Martin, wrote a book about their ordeal called *Rest In Power*. Five years after Trayvon's death, *Time* magazine interviewed his parents. Tracy and Sybrina told *Time* that they wrote their story to encourage other families that have lost children. Tracy said that the way he has found healing is to help others.

At the end of the interview, the reporter asked, "You have a deep faith in God and trust in Scripture. How has your faith changed since Trayvon's death?" Tracy Martin said, "There is only one way to come out of that dark place, and that is the power of prayer. I've heard people say we were a chosen family. I don't believe that; I just believe that God doesn't make mistakes."<sup>6</sup>

God wants to bless us with success and power, and **GOD WANTS TO BLESS US WITH PROTECTION.** Every one of us has to bear some burdens and endure some pain, even Jabez. In our pain, God always wants to surround us with his love and care. He wants to preserve our life and protect us from harm.

Pastor Steve Nickles had a three-year-old daughter named Sara. He bought her a small aquarium with four fish in it. The first fish died when Sara was away at her grandparents. Her mother just flushed it down the toilet and didn't tell Sara about it. But Sara discovered the

second dead fish when she got home. It had become entangled in the little plastic bushes in the aquarium. Steve's wife called him at the office and said that Sara wanted to talk to her dad. In her three-year-old way, Sara explained that the fish had died, she had found it in the bushes, and that she and mommy were going to have a funeral for it in the back yard.

It's sad enough to realize that your child has just experienced the first of many losses in his or her life, but what really got to Steve was the last thing Sara said before she hung up the phone: "Daddy, please keep me from getting caught in the bushes."<sup>7</sup>

Your heavenly Father wants to protect you from getting caught in the bushes. Jesus taught his disciples to pray for protection. We pray every week in the Lord's Prayer, "Deliver us from evil." Jabez prayed that God's hand would be with him and that God would keep him from hurt and harm. The one who had to live with the burden of the name "Pain" all his life long prayed that he would be spared any more.

We all experience pain in this life; there's no way around that. But enough is always enough. We never ask for more, do we? The good news is, when the tough times come, when life hurts, we can pray for and depend on the protection of God to save us from the power of evil and give us the victory through the trial. His hand will be with us every day and forever.

So what do we do with all of this? God wants to bless us with success and power and protection. That's very nice. What do we do with that?

I believe God blesses us to be a blessing. That's what he told Abraham when he called him to go to a new land. He would be blessed to be a blessing. In the Old Testament, the blessing is a powerful thing. The words of blessing change things; they create a new reality for the one who is blessed. Think about how powerful Isaac's blessing was to Jacob, enough to betray his brother Esau to get it. Remember how important Jacob's blessing was to his 12 sons who became the tribes of Israel. Jesus even blessed his disciples before he

ascended into heaven. At the end of the Gospel of Luke, *“he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and they were continually in the temple blessing God.”*<sup>8</sup> Receiving the blessing of Jesus, the disciples got busy blessing others.

When God blesses us, the faithful response is to bless others. Lisa Yebuah, a wonderful young preacher from Raleigh, North Carolina, closed out our Annual Conference two years ago preaching on blessing. She said her great insight came when she realized that she ate food every day, and she blessed her food every day. That may not seem like a profound insight, but it led her to understand that just like she ate every day and blessed her food every day, every day she encountered children of God who need a blessing. Every day, God put people in her path, people in the church, neighbors on her street, the clerk in the store, someone lost, someone broken, someone sick, someone in pain. Because she had been so blessed by God, it was her calling and opportunity to speak the word of blessing into their lives as well. Because we have been so blessed by God, it is our calling and opportunity to speak the word of blessing into the lives of our families, our friends, our co-workers, even the stranger in our midst.

The world says “No” to people every day, because of their gender, race, nationality, economic condition. People are in pain. They feel the curse of life. But God says “Yes” to them. God says “I want to bless you with success and power and protection.” God said “Yes” to Jabez; after the prayer, the Scripture says, *“God granted what he asked.”*<sup>9</sup> Let your words and your actions be the “Yes” of God to the people in pain you encounter each and every day. And God will bless your heart.

Let’s pray this prayer together as we close: ***“Oh, that you would bless me and enlarge my border, and that your hand might be with me, and that you would keep me from hurt and harm!”***

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<sup>1</sup> I Chronicles 4:10.

<sup>2</sup> Greg Asimakoupoulos, *PreachingToday.com*, source: Bill Bright, *"How to Be Filled with the Spirit"* (Campus Crusade publication)

<sup>3</sup> James 4:2.

<sup>4</sup> Bruce Wilkinson, *The Prayer of Jabez: Breaking Through to the Blessed Life* (Three Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Press, 2000)

<sup>5</sup> Psalm 118:24-25.

<sup>5</sup> Steve Farrar, *Point Man*, cited on *PreachingToday.com*.

<sup>6</sup> Elizabeth Dias, "Interview with parents of Trayvon Martin, Sybrina Fulton and Tracy Martin," *Time* (2-6-17).

<sup>7</sup> Steve Nickles, *PreachingToday.com*.

<sup>8</sup> Luke 24:50-53.

<sup>9</sup> I Chronicles 4:10.