

PRIME ESTATE HERE OR A MANSION IN HEAVEN?

Today's text: (i) 1 Chron. 4: 9-10 (ii) John 14: 1-7

Extracts:

1. **“And Jabez was more honourable than his brethren; and his mother called his name Jabez, saying, because I bare him with sorrow. 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” [1 Chron. 4: 9-10]**
2. [Jesus said to His disciples] **“In My Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go and prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that, where I am, there ye may be also” [Jn 14: 2-3]**

Bakassi Peninsula is a narrow stretch of land on the border between Nigeria and Cameroun. Before World War I, Cameroun was a German colony while Nigeria was a British colony until independence in 1960. In 1913, Germany signed an agreement with the United Kingdom which made Bakassi Peninsula part of the German colony, Kameroun. Following the defeat of Germany by the Allied Forces in 1918, Kameroun was split into two protectorates: the Eastern part was ceded to France and the Western part to the UK that administered it as part of Nigeria. At Nigeria's independence in 1960, Western Cameroon voted in a United Nations-supervised plebiscite to join Eastern Cameroun to form the modern independent state of Cameroun. Suddenly, from the mid-70's, Nigerian governments began to contest Cameroun's sovereignty over Bakassi, in spite of the fact that historical and legal documents pointed to the contrary. Nigeria used its military might to hold on to the land. Cameroun then had to take the matter to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague, Netherlands, in 1994. In 2002, the ICJ confirmed what was already well established, that the land belonged to Cameroun.

Why did Nigeria want to enlarge its territory to Bakassi? It was because oil had been discovered there! It had become prime estate that was worth fighting for. Right now in your life, there is a prime estate that you are targeting: a new job, a promotion, professional excellence, business expansion, and any achievement that can enlarge your influence space. Jabez was in a similar situation and asked God to enlarge his territory and God did. Certainly, you would like to know how Jabez did it so that you can imitate him. However, I am making you a better offer today. Why settle for a prime estate here on earth when you can ask God for a mansion up there in heaven? That is the subject of today's lesson.

1. Let me introduce you to Jabez!

In the two verses [9 and 10] of **1 Chronicles Chapter 4**, we can put together the following profile of Jabez:

a) *He came from a royal lineage*

Verses 1-23 of that chapter trace the genealogy of the tribe of Judah. We know that Judah, the fourth son of Jacob (Israel) inherited the leadership of his father's house because his three elder brothers had been discredited. Reuben, the firstborn, slept with one of his father's wives on his father's bed. For that, his father cursed him, saying, "Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel" [**Gen. 49: 3-4**]. The next two, Simeon and Levi, organized the death of Shechem (who had defied their sister, Dinah) and so many other people of his city. Jacob saw their action as making him stink among the Canaanites and the Perizzites [**Gen. 34: 1-31**]. For that, he cursed them, saying, "cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel. I will divide them in Jacob and scatter them in Israel" [**Gen. 49: 7**].

Of Judah, his father prophesied, "thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise;... thy father's children shall bow down before thee. Judah is a lion's whelp... The scepter shall not depart from Judah" [**vv. 8-10**]. This is the lineage of David and Jesus Christ. Therefore, Jabez came from a royal line. By faith in Christ, this royalty has also extended to us. That is why we have been called a chosen generation, a royal priesthood and a peculiar people [**1 Pet. 2: 9**].

b) *Yet he was born a child of sorrow*

That Jabez was born into royalty did not mean that he was born with a silver spoon in his mouth. We are told that "his mother called his name Jabez, saying, because I bare him with sorrow" [**1 Chron. 4: 9**]. What could have made her give such a name to her son?

Another child that would have borne a similar name was Benjamin, the last son of Jacob [**Gen. 35: 16-19**]. Jacob had fled from his father-in-law, with his family and belongings, to return to his father, Isaac. On the way, Rachel went into labour and died soon after her second son had been born. She gave him the name, Benoni, which means "the son of my sorrow" but Jacob changed it immediately to Benjamin, "the son of my right hand" [**v. 18**]. In the case of Jabez's mother, no man, posing as the baby's father, contested to change his name, as Jacob had done with Benjamin. Therefore, one possible explanation of his mother's sorrow is that Jabez might have been born after the death of his father. As a single parent, she had to fend for herself and her other children.

Many of us did not have a better experience. There are some of us who had to fend for themselves right from childhood even when they had both parents. Statistics published by the International Labour Organization (ILO) suggest that child labour is widespread in Asia, Africa and Latin America. There are also some of us who have been or are being raised in single parent homes [by death, divorce or never married] where each member has had to struggle on his/her own. Even in homes where both parents are working, the going is not easy, given the current economic hardship ravaging most developing and some advanced countries today. Therefore, we can feel what Jabez had to endure in his upbringing. He was very much like us.

c) *And turned out more honourable than all his brothers!*

In spite of the circumstances of his birth, he turned out to be more honourable than all his brothers [**1 Chron. 4: 9**]. To be honourable means to be highly regarded or respected or esteemed. In that league of people of honour we have, for example, Joseph [**Gen. 41: 41-43**] and Joshua [**Num. 27: 18-20**], Jesus [**Jn 1: 29-30**] and Paul [**Acts 9: 15; 2 Pet. 3: 15-16**]. When Joshua was appointed to succeed Moses, God said to Moses, “Thou shalt put some of thine honour upon him, *that all the congregation of the children of Israel may be obedient... at his word shall they go out, and at his word they shall come in*” [**Num. 27: 20-21**].

Honour comes from several sources, some of which are as follows:

- Wisdom: among the benefits of wisdom are “length of days” and “in her left hand riches and *honour*” [**Prov. 3: 16**]. After granting Solomon wisdom, God said, “I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches and *honour*” [**1 Kgs 3: 12-13**].
- Honouring God: God told Eli when his sons were defiling the house of God, “Them that honour Me I will honour, and they that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed” [**1 Sam. 2: 30**].
- Humility and subjection to discipline and correction: The word of God says “poverty and shame shall be to him that refuseth instruction: but he that regardeth reproof shall be honoured” [**Prov. 13: 18**].
- Serving God and man: Jesus taught the people “If any man serve Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there shall also My servant be; if any man serve Me, him will My Father honour” [**Jn 12: 26**].

From the foregoing, we have a good idea of the kind of person that Jabez was. He came from a hard and trying background, just like most of us. He obeyed his mother’s instructions, especially with respect to fearing God and obeying His commandments, just like some of us. Consequently, he found favour with God

and man. He became the most honourable member of his family. It should not surprise us that God listened to his prayer for “the Lord is far from the wicked; but He heareth the prayer of the righteous” [**Prov. 15: 29**].

2. Jabez’s territory was enlarged!

As we have said repeatedly, *obedience is the key to receiving God’s blessings*. Given Jabez’s profile, his only prayer that God would not have answered is the one that would have hurt him! Here are the blessings that he asked for and *received*:

a) *Position and power*

Jabez asked God to “enlarge my coast” [**1 Chron. 4: 10**]. In other words, he prayed God to enlarge his territory. Ordinarily, that would mean making his land holdings larger or more prosperous than before. However, the territory could also be seen in terms of “influence space.” There are many people in positions of power but they have no influence! They are not respected. There are many developing countries larger than the United States [in land area and population], yet they can never command a fraction of the latter’s influence in the affairs of the world. Therefore, Jabez was asking God to empower him with His anointing, wherever he was and whatever he did.

This is so true in modern organizations, whether secular or church. One secondary school principal succeeds another in the same school and they produce different results with the same resources. You find two directors of equal rank in the same organization and one is more influential than the other. We attribute the differences in most cases to personal qualities or circumstances or whatever. The truth is that promotion comes from God who “putteth down one and setteth up another” [**Ps. 75: 6**]. After describing to Moses how to build the Tabernacle, God gave him the name of Bezaleel saying, “I have filled him with the *Spirit of God in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship to devise cunning works, to work in gold and in silver and in brass*” [**Ex. 31: 1-4**]. Therefore, our professional skills come from God. He enlarges our territory when we become respected by our peers and win awards for excellence. We owe God the gratitude for such.

b) *Favour*

The next prayer request was that God’s hand be with him. The Scriptures say, “when a man’s ways please the Lord, He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him” [**Prov. 16:7**].

When Jacob was taking his family back to Canaan, he needed to pass through Esau's territory. Years back, he had stolen Esau's blessing and it was his threat to kill his twin-brother that forced Rebecca and Isaac to send Jacob to Rebecca's brother. Jacob was so afraid that Esau would avenge the wrong. But something happened. As Jacob approached Esau's territory, he saw a band of angels sent by God to be with him and his family [**Gen. 32: 1-2**]. One of them wrestled with Jacob all night but could not prevail. He blessed him on request and changed his name from Jacob (the trickster) to Israel (the prince of God) [**vv. 3-32**]. By the time that the two brothers met, "Esau ran to meet him and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him; and they wept" [**Gen. 33: 1-4**]. That is what we get when God's hand is with us-favour from friend and foe alike.

c) *Protection and peace of mind*

Jabez asked God to keep him from evil so that "it may not grieve me" [**1 Chron. 4: 10**]. This is a script from the Lord's Prayer in which Jesus taught His disciples, "lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil" [**Matt. 6: 13**]. Temptation is the door that Satan opens for us. When we pass through, then evil strikes because "whoso breaketh an hedge, a serpent shall bite him" [**Ecc. 10: 8**]. Jabez was asking God to shield him away from evil because he would not be able to stand the regrets of disobedience.

This should be a popular prayer with us. Sometimes, we are tempted by the magnitude of our blessings to sin against God. For example, the flip side of honour is pride. We soon find our egos so pumped up that we even behave as if we are bigger than God. No wonder "the fear of the Lord is to hate evil, *pride and arrogancy, and the evil way*" [**Prov. 8: 13**]. If your territory is enlarged and you become too filled with material affluence, you could be tempted to engage in activities that offend God, such as sexual immorality, drug and alcohol addiction and idol worship. That is why we are warned "the love of money is the root of all evil, which while some coveted after, *they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows*" [**1 Tim. 6: 10**]. Peace of mind comes from always using our blessings to worship God and by limiting our wants. That was Jabez's prayer.

We are told that all of Jabez's prayers were answered. But he could have asked for more!

3. Ask for a mansion in heaven!

Since God answers the prayers of the righteous, that is, those who trust Him and walk according to His word, I would not stop to only ask for earthly treasures "where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal."

Instead, I would prefer to lay up my treasures in heaven “where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal. *For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also*” [Matt. 6: 19-21]. So, I would ask for a mansion in heaven!

In **Matthew 13: 44**, Jesus told the Parable of the Hidden Treasure. In the story, He likened *the kingdom of heaven* to a treasure hidden in a field. When a man found the treasure, he hid it and “for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he had and buyeth that field.” Therefore, I am prepared to give up my enlarged territory, my honour and prestige and every other blessing that God has given me on earth so that I can obtain a piece of property in that kingdom of heaven! After all, what does it profit a person “if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” [Matt. 16: 26].

Jesus has also called the kingdom of heaven “My Father’s house.” In that house, “there are many mansions... I go to prepare a place for you... I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; *that where I am, there ye may be also*” [Jn 14: 2-3]. I want one of those mansions!

4. Conclusion

When Peter asked Jesus what reward He had for the disciples who had given up all they had to follow Him, He replied, “There is no man that hath left house or parents or brethren or wife or children *for the kingdom of God’s sake*, who shall not receive *manifold more in this present time* and in the world to come *life everlasting*” [Lk 18: 28-30]. In other words, Jabez’s blessings and a mansion in heaven are two sides of the same coin. The same *spirit of obedience*, which sustains your earthly blessings, is also the one that sustains your *grace* of salvation by Jesus Christ that will give you the certificate of occupancy to your mansion in heaven.

So, as you enjoy your prime estate on earth, don’t forget your mansion in heaven. Don’t live for less!