

## The Vulnerable Christ

"Jabez called upon the God of Israel, saying, "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 harm so that it might not bring me pain!" And God granted what he asked." (1 Chronicles 4:10, ESV)

The prayer of Jabez is a well-known verse, something like a favorite son of many brothers among the doctrines and histories presented in Chronicles. Why is it so well known, head and shoulders above its brother verses? In recent years, popular preachers have preached popular sermons centered around this verse, making it popular in the minds of many who name Christ as their Lord and Savior. See, Jabez prayed that Yahweh God would enlarge his territory in blessing, would minister to his needs with his very hand, and would prevent him from experiencing harm, discomfort, or pain. Many prayers have been dropped in God's red postbox, but this one stands out because the writer tells us: God granted what Jabez asked for.

Who would argue with such a prayer? Who would not prefer that God blessed them, walked with them, and kept them from pain? Yet, let us consider three reasons why a life without discomfort or pain might not be advantageous for Christians.

1. Discipleship requires some discomfort. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, "Therefore we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions that you are enduring. This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering." (2 Thes. 1:4-5) If persecutions and afflictions are the fruits of steadfastness and faith, let us bear these fruits when necessary. Even a \$100 bill is marked up with a pen from time to time to check its authenticity. How much more us, the currency of God in this world, handed over time and again in this life?

2. Evangelism requires some discomfort. Consider the example of Jesus, how he endured suffering obediently on the cross for the benefit of others who would have faith in him. (Phil. 2:8) If the one whose message we preach suffered, should not his messengers? (cf. 1 Jno. 3:16)

3. Righteous living requires some discomfort. While we cast our anxieties on God, we strive to resist Satan, enduring the suffering he stirs up against us. (2 Pet. 5:8-9)

Let us recognize our need to be vulnerable at times, open to being hurt so that we might use opportunities to reach out to others who do not know Christ, and those who know him but need encouragement. Such trouble in our service to God and ministry to others has an eternal purpose in glorifying our Creator. Remember: Whoever does not take up his cross and follow Jesus is not worthy to be his disciple. (Mat. 10:38; Luk. 14:27)