

Sermon outline and notes © Dr. Stephen Felker  
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18510 Branders Bridge Rd., Colonial Heights, VA 23834  
Monday, July 29, 2019

## Jeremiah 33:2-3      “God’s Telephone Number”

Intro. The title of my message this morning has been borrowed from someone else. In fact, I remember Pat Porter asking me one time, “Do you know God’s telephone number?” I said, “No, what is it?” He said, “It is Jeremiah 33:3.” After all, in that verse God says, “Call to Me and I will answer you...” Think about it for a moment. If I told you that I had a special telephone that was a direct line to heaven, and if I could guarantee you that if you picked up your end of the phone, God would be on the other end to answer, that telephone would be priceless. There would be people who would be standing in line waiting to talk to God on that phone.

Well I want to tell you that we already have such a direct line to heaven. It is not a special phone or device, but prayer is man’s hotline to heaven. The minute you pick up your end of the line, God picks up His end of the line. Even though the telephone had not been invented in Jeremiah’s day, I think that verb is so appropriate “call to me.” With God you are closer than a phone call away when you pray.

I believe that one of the main problems in the church and among believers is the lack of prayer. We are so busy with work, social media, and keeping up with our kids and grandkid’s activities, that we feel we just don’t have time to pray as we ought. The church today is powerless because the church today is prayerless. Did you pray this morning for God to work in our worship service today? God has done everything possible to encourage us to pray but strangely enough, we do just about everything but pray, except perhaps, as a last resort.

So I hope that today’s message will motivate us to pray more, and with greater faith than in the past. There is a great need for prayer. Our church needs revival. Souls need to be saved. Some of our members need healing from cancer and other diseases, including several of our deacons. So let’s see first from our text:

### I. GOD'S COMMAND TO PRAYER

When God says in v.3, “Call to Me,” this is not a request, nor is it a suggestion. This is a command. The verb “call” is an imperative in the Hebrew language. Imagine that! God’s own people need a command to pray, or else we will not pray as we ought.

How is this? No one has to command us to eat. Most people don’t have to be commanded to go to work. That paycheck is all the motivation we need. As adults, no one has to command us to go to our beds to rest. But we often do neglect to wrestle with God in prayer, and so God has to command us to pray! We seem to have hours for the world, and only moments for Christ! Hence, we need to be commanded to attend to that very act which ought to be our greatest happiness and highest privilege to perform, viz. to meet with our God.

Do you remember the story of Jonah, how a dangerous storm arose at sea, and instead of praying, he was fast asleep. So the others in the boat said to him, “What do you mean, sleeper? Arise, call on your God...” (1:6). That is an exhortation which is needed by us as well as by Jonah in the storm.

There are many other times in Scripture where we are told to pray. God says in Ps. 50:15, “Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver you...” Isa. 55:6 says, “Seek the LORD

while He may be found, Call upon Him while He is near.” Jesus commanded His disciples in Mt. 26:41, “Watch and pray....” The apostle Paul commanded in 1 Thess. 5:17, “Pray without ceasing.” James wrote, “Draw near to God and He will draw near to you” (4:8). Surely these commands indicate that God is always ready to hear our appeals. With so many commands to pray, we should obey God, and just do it without hesitation.

To not heed this command to pray is not just a weakness, it is a wickedness. It is not just a shame, it is a sin. Lest you have never thought of prayerlessness as being a sin, Samuel the prophet said, “Moreover as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you...” (1 Samuel 12:23). I find it amazing that God has to command us to pray.

Did you know that God’s desire for us to pray is so great that He will even do or allow things to *drive* us to pray? You will notice in v.1 that this command to pray came to Jeremiah while “he was still shut up in the court of the prison.” Now Jeremiah was in prison for preaching the Word of God. Being in prison will certainly drive you to prayer, or it should. It’s amazing how often someone in prison is happy to see a preacher, and have the preacher pray for them! It is amazing how God can use difficulties in our lives to draw us to Him in prayer. So God says in James 5:13-14, “Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms. Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him....” God could also say, “Are your children troubling you? Call unto me. Is your burden so heavy that you feel you will break beneath its load? Call unto me!” Ps. 55:22 says, “Cast your burden on the LORD, and He shall sustain you; He shall never permit the righteous to be moved.”

I heard about one principal who loved the Lord and he had a sign in his office that stated, “In the event of nuclear attack, fire, or earthquake, the ban on prayer is temporarily lifted.” God has a way of driving even schools to pray. I witnessed a lot of praying going on even in places of government in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks.

What about the last time you had a difficulty? Did you recognize it as a call to prayer? You should have. I have experienced in my own life seasons of great difficulty that have driven me to prayer to a greater extent, and with greater passion than normal.

So may we heed this command to call on the Lord in prayer. Let us do so often as individuals, as families, and as a church. We have prayer groups that meet on Wednesday night and Friday morning. Will you come and pray with us?

So we have seen the God’s Command to Pray. We need to heed that command every day. Now let’s think about a few aspects of that command from our text:

A. *Pray to God* – Too often when we have a problem, we first look to everyone and everything but God first. We talk to our closest friends, or a trusted counselor. We may even search google for advice. In fact, Cheryl and I have this round box at home and all we have to say is, “Hey google...,” and a female voice will respond, often telling us what we want to know. Yet the first Person we ought to seek out when we have a problem is God. Notice that God commands, “Call to me.” When we pray, we talk directly to God.

Now if you were to call the President of the United States this morning you would not get to talk to him. You most likely would not even get to talk to one of his top aids or even his secretary. But when you pray to God, you don’t have to go through assistants, aides, the Virgin Mary or angels; you go directly to God. God says, “Call to me.” Why talk to a low-level employee when you can talk to the owner? When you pray you are immediately ushered into the very presence of God. The author of Hebrews wrote, “Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (4:16).

Furthermore, notice from our text that we should:

B. Pray about Everything - Notice there is no restriction to this praying. God did not say, "Call unto me if it is important" or, "if it is serious." We are not only to talk to God any time, at any place, we are also to talk to God about anything. Paul said in Phil. 4:6, "Be anxious for nothing, but in *everything* by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God." Peter said in 1 Peter 5:7, "casting *all* your care upon Him, for He cares for you." [Italics added for emphasis]. Whatever your care or concern is, you can talk to God about it.

Ah, but I must add a truth about prayer that is found in the context. Though God commands us to pray, we also see in the context that we should:

C. Avoid the Barrier to Prayer – God says in the last of v.5, "all for whose wickedness I have hidden My face from this city." There is a contrast between the impending destruction of Jerusalem and the future restoration of Jerusalem, which will come when God's people get right with Him and call on Him in prayer. But the destruction of Jerusalem was caused by the wickedness of the people, which resulted in God hiding His face from the city, refusing the answer their cries for deliverance.

What a word picture that is! When someone is angry with you, they may turn their face from you. They show no favor to you. Even so, the figure of God hiding His face is found frequently in the Old Testament to describe His anger and the withdrawal of His favor and protection. God says in Deut. 31:18, "And I will surely hide My face in that day because of all the evil which they have done...."<sup>1</sup> Willful sin and rebellion against God causes Him to turn His face from us, and hinders our prayers to him. That is why Isa. 59:2 says, "But your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear."<sup>2</sup> Yet God is a gracious and forgiving God. If we will only repent of our sins, we can call on God in prayer and He will hear. Isa. 54:8 says, "'With a little wrath I hid My face from you for a moment; But with everlasting kindness I will have mercy on you,' Says the LORD, your Redeemer." So repent of your sins, confess them to God, and you will be able to call on God and He will surely hear your prayers once again.

Now, notice from our text:

## II. GOD'S PROMISE TO ANSWER PRAYER

Here is a wonderful promise from God. If we call upon Him in prayer, He promises, "I will answer you." He will respond. God not only hears prayer; He heeds prayer. So notice with me:

A. The Certainty of This Promise - He does not say, "I might answer." God says, "I *will* answer you." But someone asks, "Does God always answer prayer?" Well, if you are a child of God, and you have dealt with your sin, then absolutely, the answer is "Yes." The problem that should concern us is not unanswered prayer but unasked prayer! James 4:2 says, "You do not have because you do not ask." Jesus promised in Matt. 7:7, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you."

Now there are several reasons why we can be so certain that God will give a response to our

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<sup>1</sup> See also Job 13:24; Ps 44:24; Isa 45:15; 59:2; Micah 3:4; 2 Cor 4:3.

<sup>2</sup> Likewise, Micah 3:4 says, "Then they will cry to the LORD, But He will not hear them; He will even hide His face from them at that time, Because they have been evil in their deeds."

prayers:

1. Because of God's Nature - He has revealed Himself in the gospel as a God of love, full of grace and truth; and how can He refuse to help those of His creatures who humbly in His own appointed way seek His face and favor?

One time when the Athenian senate found it most convenient to meet together in the open air, as they were sitting in their deliberations, a sparrow, pursued by a hawk, flew in the direction of the senate. Being hard pressed by the bird of prey, it sought shelter in the bosom of one of the senators. But he, being a man of rough and vulgar character, took the bird from his bosom, dashed it on the ground and so killed it. Whereupon the whole senate rose in uproar, and without one single dissenting voice, condemned him to die, as being unworthy of a seat in the Senate with them or to be called an Athenian, if he did not render help to a creature that confided in him.

Can we suppose that the God of heaven, whose nature is love, could tear out of His bosom the poor fluttering dove that flies from the eagle of justice into the bosom of His mercy?

2. Because of the Sacrifice of Jesus - Then Romans 8:32 says, "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" Paul argues from the greater to the lesser. If the Lord was willing to sacrifice His Son for guilty sinners like us, surely He will freely give us whatever else we need! The streaming wounds of Jesus are the sure guarantee for answered prayer. As the rain-cloud brings the shower, so prayer brings the blessing.

3. Because of Our Past Experience - How many times has God answered prayer in the past? Many times. Most of us can rise in testimony to answered prayer. Your conversion was probably a direct answer to prayer.

Now God does not always answer prayer immediately and affirmatively. So let's consider next of all:

#### B. The Variety of God's Answers

1. Sometimes His Answers Are Direct - Sometimes we ask and God says, "Yes, I grant your request now."

Samson is a great example of this kind of prayer. Samson had been captured by the Philistines. They had put out his eyes and put him to forced slavery. But Samson had repented and had gotten right with God. He was taken to their pagan temple that he might be a spectacle before them. They were mocking Samson and Samson's God. He was standing between the two pillars that supported the temple. Then we are told in Judges 16:28, "Then Samson called to the Lord, saying, 'O Lord God, remember me, I pray! Strengthen me, I pray, just this once, O God, that I may, with one blow, take vengeance on the Philistines for my two eyes!'" Immediately, and affirmatively, God heard and answered his prayer. His strength returned and vengeance was taken.

Now we are so selfish by nature that that is the only kind of answer that we want from God. We sometimes think that if God does not give us *what* we want, *when* we want it, then God has not answered our prayers. But that is not true.

2. Sometimes God's Answers Are Delayed - Sometimes God says, "Yes, but not now." We need to keep in mind that God's delays are not God's denials. Friday, I saw a church sign that said, "Faith in God also means faith in His timing." Hab. 2:3-4 says, "For the vision is yet for an appointed time.... Though it tarries, wait for it; Because it will surely come... the just shall live by his faith."

One of the greatest mistakes a parent can make with a child is giving that child too much, too soon. Too often we give our children money without teaching them how to handle their money.

If you give your child too much freedom before they are mature enough to handle it, they can be injured or even killed. God knows what we are mature enough to handle at the present time and what is best for us in the long run.

3. Sometimes His Answers Are Denials - Sometimes the answer is “No.” If God says no to a prayer request, it is simply because He knows it is not best for you, or it is not in His will for your life. We need to accept the fact that God is sovereign. He is the One on the throne. We are the creature, not the Creator. Are we willing to accept God’s answer when it is “No.”

Think of the many “No” answers to prayers recorded in the Bible. Moses prayed, “O God, let me go into the Promised Land,” and God said, “Do not talk to Me about that any more; you cannot go in.” David prayed for the child of Bathsheba, “Heal the child, and let him live.” But God said, “No; I won’t heal him; I am going to take him home,” and David bowed his head at last and said, “He cannot come back to me, but I will go to him,” and David’s heart was drawn toward Heaven in a way it would never have been otherwise. Elijah was the man who could stand before King Ahab, but ran away to the juniper tree when Jezebel was after him. He said, “Let me die.” How thankful we are today that God did not grant that request.

4. Sometimes His Answers Are Different - Sometimes God says, “Yes, but I have something better for you.” Abraham prayed, “O God, that Ishmael may live before You,” meaning, “Let him be the inheritor of the promises.” But God later said, “No; in Isaac shall thy seed be called” (KJV). We may pray for healing of the body, and instead God takes us to heaven where we are completely healed from all sickness and disease. Ruth Graham has said on several occasions, “If God had always answered my prayer, I would have married the wrong man three times.” As it turned out, she became the wife of one of the greatest evangelists this world has ever known.

So we have seen God’s command to pray, and His promise to answer prayer. Now let us see:

### III. GOD’S REVELATION THROUGH PRAYER

Had you been writing Jeremiah 33:3 you probably would have substituted the word “give” for the word “show,” “I will ... give you great and mighty things....” But there is a great lesson to learn in that little word “show.” The word (*nagad*) also means to “to tell, to declare, to make known.” The primary purpose of prayer is not to release God’s treasure; it is to reveal God’s truth. Prayer is not to be used for the things that God can give you, as much as for the truths God can teach you, especially about Him.

Notice carefully from the last of v.3, where we will see that:

A. God Can Reveal Some Things Only through Prayer - You see prayer was never meant to be a one-way conversation. As you communicate to God, He uses His answers to prayer to show things to us we could not learn any other way. There are some things that can only be learned in the school of prayer. We can learn much from the reading of God’s Word. But there are some lessons and truths that we learn best through our personal experiences in prayer. Besides, prayer is important in helping us to learn the hidden truths of God’s Word. Luther wrote, “To have prayed well is to have studied well.” My brethren, there are heights in experiential knowledge of the things of God which the eagle’s eye of acumen and philosophic thought have never seen.

In this modern age, it will be a great day when we learn that reason is no substitute for revelation. The purpose of prayer is not to tell God what we want from Him, but rather to allow God to tell us what He wants from us. As Jesus taught us in what is called, The Lord’s Prayer, we

are not to pray to get our will done in heaven. We are to pray to get God's will done on earth. Someone has wisely observed that the prayer that gets to heaven is the prayer that starts in heaven. What we do is simply close the circuit. In other words, real prayer is led and inspired by God, and given in response to the revelation of God.

Years ago Amy Brink noticed that Garret, her firstborn, had gone off in the car without his wallet. And so she called out to her children and said, "Why don't we pray that Garret will realize that he left his wallet. So they prayed. Sure enough, it wasn't long before Garret came home to get his wallet." They asked him, "When did you realize that you had forgotten your wallet?" He told them, and it was about the same time they had prayed. Now God answered prayer, but He also allowed Amy to teach her children the value and importance of prayer through that experience. God wants to reveal important truths to us as He answers prayer.

Furthermore, we see in our text that:

B. Some Things Are Known Only to God – Notice that the things which God wants to show us are "great and mighty things." The word "mighty" (*batsar*) is a most interesting word. It refers to a fortress or to the walls around a city. It refers to something inaccessible. In fact, the combination of these two Hebrew words translated great and mighty is used elsewhere only of the strong cities of the Canaanites (Num. 13:28; Deut. 1:28; 9:1; Josh. 14:12). A modern equivalent is Area 51 in Nevada! A lot of people want to know what the government might be hiding from us in that area. There is even talk of people storming that area to find out! So figuratively, it refers to something that is a mystery, a secret; things which lie beyond the limits of human power to discover. God says he will show us things that are hidden and inaccessible to everyone but Him, and to those to whom He reveals these truths. The God who has the power to execute His decrees is quite prepared to give the believer an insight into His great thoughts regarding the future, as we see in the prophecy of the context of our main verse. So God reveals certain unknown truths to His people as they pray, and He shows them what He is going to do. So often, we then witness answers to prayer that reveal even more about God.

C. Some Things Only God Can Do – Our text also mentions "great" (*gadowl*) things.<sup>3</sup> That gets us into the realm of God! This is certainly true of the sufferer under trial: if he waits upon God in prayer much he shall receive greater deliverances than he has ever dreamed of. Paul wrote in Ephesians 3:20, "Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us." Expect great things of a God who gives such great promises as these.

It is important to understand the context of this great promise. Jeremiah was in prison. In such a circumstance, he needed assurance that he is praying to a God who can do great and mighty things. Jerusalem was under siege. It was about to fall to the Babylonians. Most of the people would be killed or carried off into exile. The land would become largely desolate for dozens of years. It would seem that Israel would cease to be a nation forever. Yet look at what God reveals and promises will happen in vv.6-7, "Behold, I will bring it health and healing; I will heal them and reveal to them the abundance of peace and truth. And I will cause the captives of Judah and the captives of Israel to return, and will rebuild those places as at the first." Then he makes a wonderful promise to raise up the Messiah, a Savior, in vv.15-17. God promised great things, and He delivered great things.

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<sup>3</sup> "Great" is actually an adjective modifying the word that signifies a fortress. Nevertheless, what God wants to reveal to us through answers to prayer includes His greatness, as revealed through great answers to prayer.

Can our God do such great things? Indeed He can! Prior to the promise of v.3, we read in v.2, “Thus says the LORD who made it, the LORD who formed it to establish it (the LORD is His name).” Since God had the power to create all things by the Word of His mouth, surely nothing is impossible with Him. In fact, in Mark 14:36 Jesus made the following statement right before making a prayer request, “Abba, Father, all things are possible for You....” And since His name means that He always was, and ever shall be, surely He is ever present to answer our prayers.

The same God is with us today. If you are facing a serious illness, look to God and pray to Him. Bobby Ziegenfuss, Jim Hatfield, and Jan Davis are facing cancer surgeries or treatments this week. Pray that God will do great and mighty things. If you are facing a financial crisis, look to God in prayer who owns all the wealth of this world. If you have a loved one who is an unbeliever, and not interested in the things of God, pray to God. He can open blinded eyes. He can raise the spiritually dead. Our church needs revival. Let us pray diligently, and with faith, and let God show us great things in our day as well!

Conclusion: If you are here today and not yet trusted in Jesus Christ as your Savior, may you heed to command of God in this verse: “Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know.” Romans 10:13 says, “For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

Sources: Stephen Felker, *Devotional & Explanatory Notes on the Entire Bible* (Col. Hghts, VA: Published by Author), 2019; C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978 reprint); F.B. Huey, Jr., *The New American Commentary: Jeremiah-Lamentations* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994); Dr. James Merritt (notes from his sermon on this text); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 4:10] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2011); Charles H. Spurgeon, *12 Sermons on Prayer*, Baker Book House (25G.54). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982). McGee read, but nothing added from him. Nothing available from Maclaren.

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