

GOD'S CELL PHONE NUMBER

Sermon preached by Pastor C. John Steer
Autumn Ridge Church, Rochester, MN
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Scripture: Jeremiah 33:3

Today I am going to give you **GOD'S CELL PHONE NUMBER** so you may want to enter it in your phone directory or you can scribble it down on a scrap of paper and put it in your wallet or purse so you can easily access it throughout the rest of the year.

Maybe you are unaware that God has a phone number but I assure you he does. I was given this important piece of information when I was 10 years old by my Bible class teacher.

In those days it was God's rotary phone number.

Since then he has had a technical upgrade.

I have never forgotten this number.

I don't want you to either.

I want you to remember it for the rest of your days.

For it could save your life.

So here it is. **JER 333**

Can you say that with me? **JER 333**

Now you are now part of a privileged inner circle.

Not everybody has this. It is a private number.

By the way your lifetime phone bills have all been paid for.

Now I can see some have already taken out their Smart Phone and are starting to dial.

But before you do, I need to tell you what **JER 333** stands for.

It refers to Jeremiah chapter 33 and verse 3.

Here the Lord says, **"Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know."** (Jeremiah 33:3)

There is an important reason why I am providing God's cell phone number today.

It is because we are starting our Week of Prayer.

This is a longstanding tradition at Autumn Ridge.

We do it each January.

This is certainly not the only time we pray, but we have found it immensely valuable to start the New Year by calling on God together.

So let's call this number every day during this prayer week.

To encourage us to do so I want us to look at this text closely and wring every decibel of clarity from it.



First notice **THE INSTRUCTIONS.**

When you buy a cell phone it comes with a set of instructions telling you how to use it.

Sometimes these can be daunting.

I was talking to a fellow recently who had bought a new phone and he was describing all the things it can do.

He then ruefully admitted, "I haven't actually figured out how to do any of them yet." He was thinking of taking a week off work to program his phone.

Thankfully God's instructions are much simpler.

He just says, **"Call."** That is all we have to do.

We can call at any time.

We can call when we are happy or when we are sad.

We can call about little things and big things.

We can call about private matters and national affairs.

We can call about our children or our church.

But we must call. It requires action.

There will be no response from heaven if we don't call.

James explains, **"You do not have, because you do not ask God." (James 4:2)**

Now in the context of Jeremiah 33 this call can be a cry for help. It can be a plea for God to intervene.

It acts now like a 911 call.

Perhaps we are going through an appalling crisis and our hearts are breaking.

A tragedy has entered our life or the life of someone we love. We cannot make sense of things.

At such a time we cry out to God for deliverance.

David found himself in this predicament. He tells God, **"To you I call, O Lord my rock. . . hear my cry for mercy as I call to you for help." (Psalm 28:1-2)**

Let me encourage you to call on God this week.

What should we call him?

Jesus tells us that we can call him "Father."

On one occasions the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Lord teach us to pray."

Jesus gave them a model prayer. We call it The Lord's Prayer.

It begins, **"Father, hallowed be your name." (Luke 11:2)**

Anyone who wants to learn to pray can use this prayer that Jesus taught us.

It covers every need we have.

As we are getting up in the morning or driving to work or getting ready for school we can call on God using the Lord's Prayer.

Next notice **THE PERSON.**

God says, "Call **to me.**"

That is significant because of who the "me" is.

In the previous verse we learn, **“This is what the Lord says, he who made the earth, the Lord who formed it and established it – the Lord is his name.” (Jeremiah 33:2)**

This is help worth having.

I might say to you, “Give me a call and I will try and help.” But there are many things beyond my ability.

It would be more impressive if President Obama said to us “Call me and I will do what I can.”

He has incredible resources at his disposal.

Yet there are many things that even the President of the United States cannot do.

But Yahweh can. There is nothing beyond his ability.

He is the creator of the entire universe which is so vast we can’t begin to comprehend it. But he does.

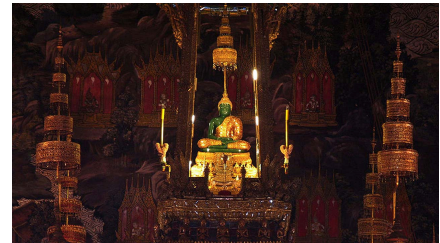
He knows every star and every planet and every black hole and every red dwarf.

He knows you and me and our names and our needs.

It is not enough to pray we need to pray to the right person. We need to call the Lord who formed the earth.

I have been in Thailand and seen people prostrate themselves before the Emerald Buddha in Bangkok.

But it is just an idol who can’t hear them or help them.



I have spent time in India watching people pay money to go into temples to make an offering to one of the hundreds of Hindu gods.

But those gods are blind and deaf and speechless.

They cannot help those dear people so their cries go unanswered.



I have spent time in Indonesia, the largest Muslim country in the world, and those folk are so faithful they get on their prayer mats five times a day and they bow toward Mecca.

But the tragedy is that they don’t know the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

They are calling out to the wrong person.



It is because we are desperately concerned about them that we have a world missions program.

It is why we support over 30 missionary families.

It is why we would like to send many more from our own fellowship, even this year, because we want people to know God’s cell phone number.

God wants all the peoples to praise him.
 He wants all the nations to be glad and sing for joy but they can't do this unless they know him.
 So let us introduce them.
 His name is the Lord. He is from everlasting to everlasting. He is the Great I AM.

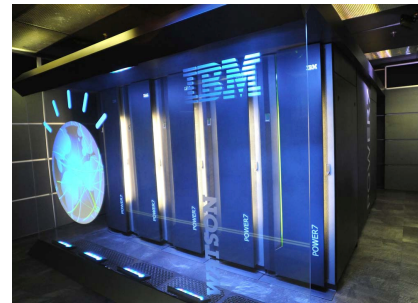
Next notice **THE GUARANTEE.**

It is magnificent. God says **"I will answer you."**
 Think of that! We never get a busy signal and thank God we don't get a wretched answering machine.
 We are never out of range and there are no roaming charges.

There is no Outsourced Service Center in a foreign country. We don't get some junior angel answering who hasn't a clue what our problem is.
 God himself is on the other end of the line.
 He guarantees "I will answer you."
 Doesn't that make a difference how we think about prayer? Here is the Lord of Glory sitting on the throne of heaven, surrounded by countless cherubim and seraphim. The elders and the four living creatures are chanting "Hallelujah, Amen."
 God is at the center of all that heavenly worship.
 Our call arrives. God does not instruct St. Peter "Tell them to call back later." No - he answers us.

Now how is this possible? Supposing a million Christians are praying at the same time.
 How can God pay attention to every one of us?
 Isaiah provides the answer.
 He tells us that God is not like us. For our God is omniscient which means he knows everything.
 Our God is omnipotent which means he can do anything.

The famous Watson super computer produced by IBM here in Rochester is capable of doing 100 thousand trillion operations a second.
 I have no idea how many that is but it sounds a lot.
 But it is a drop in the bucket compared to God's ability. His powers are unlimited.
 His knowledge is infinite.
 His love is boundless and his grace is always sufficient.



Perhaps you are thinking we are stretching this text. Can we really be confident that God hears us and answers us?
 Listen to these testimonials from satisfied customers.

From Psalm 3, **"To the Lord I cry aloud, and he answers me from his holy hill." (Psalm 3:4)**

From Psalm 4, **"The Lord will hear when I call to him." (Psalm 4:3)**

From Psalm 18, **"In my distress I called to the Lord; I cried to my God for help. From his temple he heard my voice; my cry came before him, into his ears." (Psalm 18:6)**

From Psalm 55, **"Evening, morning and noon and I cry out in distress, and he hears my voice." (Psalm 55:17)**

And if that is not enough we have Jesus' own guarantee when he says, **"Ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks the door will be opened." (Luke 11:9-10)**

In our scripture reading Jesus compared God's willingness to answer us with a Father's love for his children. He asked, **"Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion?" (Luke 11:11-12)**

We earthly fathers do our best for our children. We try to meet their needs. But we have limits. We had a wedding in our family recently. It was a joyful occasion. I was happy to do all I could for my kids. But there came a point when I had reached the end of my resources. I was emotionally drained.



All I wanted to do was go into my den, close the door and be left alone. If my children had asked, "Dad could we have this?" I would have said, "Not now. Try me again in six months."

But God never treats us that way because he never gets tired and weary. He gives us the very best gifts and to prove it Jesus says, **"How much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him." (Luke 11:13)**

As we continue to pull apart God's cell phone number we come to the climax. It is **THE PROMISE.**

And what a promise it is. **"I will tell you great and unsearchable things you did not know."**

Now this reminds us of a dimension of prayer we often forget. We sometimes think prayer is a monologue with us talking to God. But God informs us here that it is a dialogue. We speak and he responds.

We ask and he answers.

This means that at least half of our prayer time should be listening or we will miss out on this magnificent promise.

I wonder what God wants to tell us as a church in 2012? The only way we will know is by listening together.

Let me make this promise more personal.
 What does God want to tell you today?
 Why don't you ask him and then wait and listen.
 What do you hear him saying?

Perhaps we are thinking of buying an expensive item.
 Let's ask God first. Let's wait on him.
 What's he telling us to do?

Maybe we are thinking of taking a new job.
 Let's ask God for guidance and not move ahead until we have heard from him.
 Perhaps there is the possibility of a new relationship in our life. What is God telling us about it?
 The answer may come as an impression in our minds.
 It may be a verse of scripture.
 It may be a voice saying "this is the way, walk in it."
 It may be a sense of peace or unease in our soul.
 God can use many ways to speak to us.

By the reception desk at the top of the stairs we have a prayer book where people write down answers they have received to their prayers. It is a record of God keeping his promise to tell us great and unsearchable things.

Here are some excerpts.

"The Lord Jesus Christ has kept me sober for nine months now. He has done great things for me in the last year."

A lady writes, "My prayer for many years has been 'Lord teach me how to love.' I was a tomboy growing up and looked upon crying as a sign of weakness. But I became concerned at my lack of emotions during times of great loss. I lacked the compassion others seem to have. One day in prayer I felt the Spirit loosen my burden. It was as if a literal bundle had fallen from my shoulders. I knew it was my chance to love as Christ has loved me."

A man writes, "God answered my prayers when he delivered me from the empty life I was living.

He answered me when I asked if I could have a closer relationship with him when he drew me closer to himself. He answered me when I asked him to deliver me from alcohol. I tried myself but it didn't work but through him it did."

A lady writes, "Two years ago God saved me from a life of prostitution, drugs, death and destruction. I was saved through his grace."

A couple writes, "After years of infertility and two miscarriages we were blessed with a daughter. Before we knew the gender of our child our sons took it upon themselves to start praying for a healthy sister. Praise God for a healthy pregnancy and a healthy baby. We thank God for showing our sons his face."

All these people who are part of our church discovered that God keeps his promise.

Now there are two parts to this promise from God.

First he promises **TO REVEAL GREATNESS.**

"I will tell you great and unsearchable things."

The New International Study Bible has a fascinating note on this verse. It explains that the Hebrew for this phrase "great and unsearchable" usually refers to "the formidable cities of Canaan."

When the Israelites thought of something great they imagined the amazing cities of Canaan.

They had been living for 40 years in the desert. They had never seen anything like these tall impressive buildings.

But God said, "You ain't seen nothing yet.

My answer will exceed your imagination."

I believe that God wants to reveal more of his greatness to us this year.

For some of us our God is too small, too limited.

We need to discover that he is the Lord of hope.

He is the God of answers. He is the Savior of nations.

There is nothing he cannot do.

I sometimes look out of the window of my study and gaze at all this land that God has given us on this campus. I wonder what he wants us to do with it.

Now I am not suggesting a new building project but I dream of the day when all this property will be used for evangelism, missions and discipleship.

But we will not lay a brick until God has told us the great things he wants to do.

The second part of this promise is **TO REMOVE IGNORANCE.**

God says I will tell you, **"Things you do not know."**

This is important because ignorance leads to fear.

And fear paralyzes us.

Our family moved to Minnesota from Los Angeles 23 years ago. I had never experienced winters like these.

We went to Mayowood Lake and I ventured out onto the ice. It began cracking and I became very nervous.

I had visions of going through the ice.

I had no confidence and so my progress was very slow.

Then someone explained, "don't worry this ice is over a foot thick. You could drive a car on it. You are quite safe." My ignorance was removed and along with it my fear and I was able to enjoy the experience of walking on water.

Many of us are paralyzed by fear because of our ignorance. We may fear death or we may fear financial insecurity. We worry what the future may bring. In prayer God is able to tell us things we don't know like the glorious truth that he is in control, like the fact that he will provide for us, like the reality that nothing can happen to us that can separate us from his love.

In the context of this chapter in Jeremiah God's promise to tell us things we do not know is really exciting.

The people of Judah were going through a very hard time. But God promises to restore them to greatness.

He says, **"I will bring health and healing to the city. I will heal my people and will let them enjoy abundant peace and security. I will bring Judah and Israel back from captivity I will rebuild them as they were before. I will cleanse them from all the sin they have committed against me and will forgive all their sins and rebellion against me.**

Then this city will bring me renown, joy, praise and honor before all nations on earth that hear of all the good things I do for it; and they will be in awe and will tremble at the abundant prosperity and peace I provide for it." (Jeremiah 33:6-9)

Now if God can do that for his ancient people he can do it for his modern people. He can bring health and healing to us.

He can cleanse us from our sin.

Instead of bringing a reproach on God we can bring him renown, joy and honor. We can proclaim his name among the nations so that they and we tremble in awe before our sovereign God.

So that is God's cell phone number. **JER 333**

"Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know."

So here is my challenge for all of us.

Let's call upon God each day this week and ask him to tell us great and unsearchable things we do not know.

Perhaps you don't pray together as a family but you would like to start. How about tonight?

Or you are a couple who would like your marriage to be richer.

God wants that too. He wants to show you great and unsearchable things about your relationship.

Why not make a resolution to start praying together.

You will be amazed at the difference it will make to your marriage.

Let's remember God's cell phone number. We will impress into our mind by reciting it together.



**“Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.”
Jeremiah 33:3**