The Promise of Answered Prayer - Jeremiah 33:3

We’ve been learning an important truth about God – He makes promises and it’s His nature to keep those promises. Kevin De Young has written: “The Christian life starts with the promises of God. He makes claims about Himself and gives us promises about our salvation and our future. Then, having trusted in those promises, we respond in faith and obedience to God’s commands.”

Last week we enjoyed the Word of God speaking into our hearts and minds the promise of eternal life! Wow! What a promise! What joy!

Today I want us to look to the next in this series of promises we receive from God. This is the promise of answered prayer.

I came across Psalm 145:13 in my Bible reading this week: “The Lord always keeps his promises; he is gracious in all he does.” (NLT) Our topic today is “The Promise of Answered Prayer” and the main point is this: God loves to answer prayer when we want what He wants.

I’m greatly challenged by what Charles Spurgeon once said, “Prayer is nothing but taking God’s promises to Him and saying, ‘Lord, please do as You have promised ...’ When you plead His promise, then your will is His will.”

As we continue in our Summer of Promise series, I want to draw our attention to a powerful prayer promise found in Jeremiah 33:3: “Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know.” One of my goals today is that each of us will have this verse memorized by the time we’re finished.

Let’s say it together. “Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know.”

As I shared many times, in order to grasp the greatness of this text, it’s important for us to understand the context. Jeremiah was a mouthpiece of the Almighty and was charged with delivering mostly bad news to God’s people. Known as the “weeping prophet” because of his many tears, he was also bold and brave when communicating God’s message.

Due to the deliberate disobedience of God’s people, after warning upon warning, God announced that they would be punished by Babylon. Their land would be decimated and they would be deported to a pagan land. In the midst of all this mess, God gives hope to Jeremiah by telling him to buy some property (Jeremiah 32:6-15) even though it didn’t make much sense because they were about to be conquered by a foreign army. This was God’s way of promising that His people would return, which they did, albeit 70 years later.

Speaking to Judah, the southern kingdom, Jeremiah’s message was not popular because it was not positive. With the Babylonian army surrounding the city of Jerusalem, Jeremiah conveyed these weighty words from God in Jeremiah 32:3: “I am about to hand this city over to the king of Babylon, and he will capture it.” Zedekiah, the king of Judah, was infuriated and therefore imprisoned the prophet for bringing bad news.

As you read the book that bears his name, you’ll discover that Jeremiah was also thrown into a well, put in chains, and made a laughingstock. While most of us have not experienced anything like this, some of us can relate to feeling isolated, trapped, for taking a stand that was unpopular with those surrounding us.

Into this situation, under the inspiration of Holy Spirit, Jeremiah reminds Judah that God hears and answers prayer. God loves to answer prayer. In fact He promises to do so.

That reminds me of the pastor who owned a parrot. All he would say is “Let’s pray, let’s pray.” While the preacher liked the spiritual nature of his feathered friend, he tried to teach him other sayings to no avail. He remembered that a deacon in the church also had a parrot with a similar problem, except that his parrot would only say, “Let’s kiss. Let’s kiss.” He decided to try an experiment and convinced the deacon to let the parrots spend some time together in the same cage to see what would happen. The
deacon’s parrot immediately exclaimed, “Let’s kiss. Let’s kiss.” To which the preacher’s parrot said, “Thank you Lord, my prayers have been answered.”

It is true that God loves to answer prayer. That is, the prayers of His people! Let’s look at the first three verses in Jeremiah 33 to see how God promises to answer our prayers.

Remember God’s Presence
Check out verse 1 where we see that God is always present: “While Jeremiah was still confined in the courtyard of the guard, the word of the Lord came to him a second time.” Jeremiah was confined, locked up and alone. He felt ignored, rejected and despised. Friend, no matter how alone you feel, you are never alone if you have a relationship with Jesus Christ. We’ll learn more about the promise of God’s presence later.

Reflect on God’s Power
God spoke into Jeremiah’s isolation and then He reminded him of his incredible power in verse 2: “This is what the LORD says, he who made the earth, the LORD who formed it and established it – the LORD is His name.” Since God is the creator, He can handle any catastrophe or chaos that we go through. He has founded us, formed us and fixed us. If we turn back just one chapter to Jeremiah 32:27 we read these powerful words: “I am the Lord, the God of all mankind. Is anything too hard for me?”

God invites us to call Him by different names, for each title reflects a different attribute and helps us understand a bit more about His majestic power. I encourage you to incorporate these names into your times of prayer.

• When you’re filled with anxiety, call out to Jehovah Shalom, the God of peace.
• When you’re hurting, reach out to Jehovah Rapha, the God who heals.
• When you wonder if God has left you, ask Jehovah Shammah, the Lord who is there to give you assurance that you’re never alone.
• When you need God’s provision, cry out to Jehovah Jireh, the God who provides.

The name “LORD” in Jeremiah 33:2 is the name Yahweh which means, “I AM WHO I AM” first referenced in Exodus 3:14. He is the covenant-keeping God, the ultimate promise keeper. Jehovah’s very name is a pledge of fidelity because He performs all His promises. He always does what He says He will do. He never over-promises and He never under-delivers!

Respond to God’s Promise
Because God is always present and always powerful, He will keep His promise. Let’s look now at verse 3 and break it down into three parts. Let’s say it again with the reference at the beginning and the end to get it in our heads. Jeremiah 33:3: “Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know.”

1. Call to God.
Sometimes we make prayer much more complicated than it should be. At its core, prayer is simply crying out to God: “Call to me...” The word “call” means “to cry out, call aloud, literally to roar.” It was used to describe the cry of young ravens as they waited for food. It was also used of a child crying out for help when in danger.

Many have referred to Jeremiah 33:3 as God’s phone number because we’re invited to “call” Him. So what is God’s phone number? Jeremiah 33:3! I’m not sure if it is His landline or cell though!

Several years ago a movie came out called Bruce Almighty. The writers of the script gave Bruce (who was filling in for God while He was on vacation) a phone number so anyone could dial up the Almighty with a prayer. This, of course, got out of hand because Bruce was inadequate to answer all the
requests. In his wisdom, He just answered all prayers with a “yes,” and thought that settled it! But then things really got out of hand.

Anyway, my point is that many people who saw the movie wrote the number down and went home and dialed it. It belonged to a lady in St. Petersburg, Florida and she received 20 calls an hour from people who wanted to talk to God.

We need to dial in to God by remembering His number (Jeremiah 33:3). There are a ton of verses that urge us to call out to God. Here are two others that come to mind:

- Psalm 86:3: “Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I call to you all day long.”
- Psalm 145:18: “The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth.”

As natural as prayer should be, even Jeremiah the prophet had to be commanded to call out to the Lord. For some reason, we resist reaching out to God, even when we’re going through tough times. We’re a lot like Jonah who instead of crying out to God for help, went below deck and fell into a deep sleep. We need a wake-up call like he received from the ship’s captain in Jonah 1:6: “How can you sleep? Get up and call on your God!” That reminds me of the Lord’s lament in Isaiah 43:22: “Yet you have not called upon me, O Jacob, you have not wearied yourselves for me, O Israel.”

Our sleepiness and Satan himself fight to keep us from crying out to God in prayer. When the disciples couldn’t keep their eyes open in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus said this in Matthew 26:41: “Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak.”

It goes without saying but let’s say it anyway. James 4:2-3 serves as a stark reminder: “You do not have, because you do not ask God. You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.” This verse contains a secret to answered prayer that we will get back to later. Jesus said it like this in Matthew 7:7: “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.”

That great writer and expert on prayer, Andrew Murray adds, “God’s giving is inseparably connected with our asking.”

I learned this week that there are more commands in Scripture to pray than any other thing.

Let me make a suggestion. One way to pray more is to simply stop and pray with people when you talk with them, either on the phone or in person. It is rarely inappropriate to pray for someone!

2. Catch God’s Answers.

After calling on the Lord, we need to be ready to catch His answers: “...and I will answer you...” God is never preoccupied or busy or away from the phone when we call out to Him. He promises to answer us. Psalm 4:3: “The Lord will hear when I call to him.” Will you say that with me? Say it again. Can we just get honest with one another for a moment? It sometimes seems that our prayers are not answered, doesn’t it? One pastor offers some great perspective on prayer when he writes: “If the request is wrong, God says, ‘No.’ If the timing is wrong, God says, ‘Slow.’ If you are wrong, God says, ‘Grow.’ But if the request is right, the timing is right and you are right, God says, ‘Go!’”

Spurgeon had this insight: “Even the Lord’s people ask for things which it would not be for God’s glory to give, nor for their profit to receive.”

Philip Yancey writes: “By answering every possible prayer [the way we want], God would in effect abdicate His throne, turning the world over to us to run.” Heaven forbid!

Before leaving this point, the Bible does put some conditions on God answering prayer. I’ll just list a few that I’m aware of without developing them in detail.

- Make sure you’re a born again believer. Hebrews 11:6: “And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.” The only prayer from a lost person that the Lord obliges Himself to answer is the prayer for salvation.
- Make your requests in Jesus’ name. John 14:13: “And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father.” This is pivotal! “In my name” means to ask for something
that He would agree with, that He would put His name to. That the request might be “for the glory of the Father” takes out a lot of selfish praying!

• Ask according to God’s will. Matthew 6:10: “Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” God loves to answer prayer when we want what He wants.

• Confess all known sin in your life. Psalm 66:18: “If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.” Don’t sell this point short! It is crucial.

• Live in peace with your spouse. 1 Peter 3:7: “Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.” Enough said?

• Forgive those who have wronged you. Mark 11:25: “And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.” When it comes to conditional promises, this one is exemplary.

• Make sure your motives are right. James 4:3: “When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.”

• Stay close to Christ. John 15:7: “If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.”

• Listen to God’s Word. Proverbs 28:9: “If anyone turns a deaf ear to the law, even his prayers are detestable.” Are you keeping the Word of God that you know? Are my prayers detestable to God because of sin I have harbored in my heart?

• Be willing to share with the poor. Proverbs 21:13: “If a man shuts his ears to the cry of the poor, he too will cry out and not be answered.”

• Call out to God. Let’s say Jeremiah 33:3 together: “Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.”

Call out to God and Catch His Answers.

3. Comprehend God’s Greatness.

When we call out to Him and then catch His answers, we should expect the unexpected. I love how God goes way beyond what we ask for: “…and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.”

The word “tell” means “to make conspicuous something that was previously unknown.” The word “great” means “fortified.” When we call out to God and we experience His answers, we are often overwhelmed by the awesomeness of God Himself as He comes near, revealing things that we did not previously understand.

Always remember that God’s provisions are much greater than our problems. Two verses come to mind, one from the Old Testament, and one from the New:

• Isaiah 48:6: “From now on I will tell you of new things, of hidden things unknown to you.”

• 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, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.”

We don’t have time to go through all of Jeremiah 33 so let me just hit some highlights of what some of those “great and unsearchable things” are in this chapter alone. God gives Jeremiah promise after promise to give him and the nation hope. Remember, He has just had Jeremiah tell the king that the nation is about to fall to the Babylonians!

• I will bring healing and give abundant peace to my people (v. 6)
• I will bring my people back to the land (v. 7)
• I will cleanse them and forgive their sin (v. 8)
• Jerusalem will once again have honor and renown (v. 9)
• There will be sounds of joy and gladness again (v. 11)
• There will be pastures for the flocks (v. 12)
• I will raise up my righteous branch from the throne of David (v. 14-15)
• I will restore their fortunes and have compassion on them (v. 26)

A Call to Pray

Brothers and sisters, we must call out to God, we must catch His answers and then strive to comprehend His greatness.

A Christmas custom took place in England many years ago. The poor inhabitants of a village would go around town with bowls and beg for bread and other food items from the wealthy. The rule was that those with resources had to fill these bowls to the brim. The wisest of the poor brought very large bowls to the door. Whatever the size, it was filled.

Let’s make sure we are bringing big bowls to God.

Someone passed along this insight: “Whenever I am prayer-less it betrays an underlying belief that I can do life and ministry on my own, which according to Scripture is certifiably insane.”

Recognizing that we can all pray more than we do, and pray bigger prayers than we do, here are some practical prayer pointers.

1. Pray God’s promises back to Him. When you come across a promise of God, simply bring that promise to God in prayer. Let’s do that right now, using the promises we’ve covered so far in this series.
   • God, when I doubt whether I’m really your child, I claim the promise of eternal life found in 1 John 5:13: “I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.”
   • Lord, you know that I’m tempted in many ways. Thank you for the promise you’ve made to provide a way out in 1 Corinthians 10:13: “No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.”
   • Father, I’m so thankful that you promise to not hold my sins against me when I confess them to you as promised in Psalm 32:5: “Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the Lord’ – and you forgave the guilt of my sin.”
   • I am so grateful that you promise to guide me because Proverbs 3:5-6 tells me that you’ll lead me when I lean on you: “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.”

2. When you’re done talking with someone try to end the conversation with a short prayer. Remember, it is rarely inappropriate to ask someone if you can pray for them.

3. Use the weekly prayer list as a guide for praying for the ministry of FBC.

4. Send an email to the church office to get on the email prayer chain so you can pray for urgent requests.

Are you in a precarious position? If so, pray. Are you in need today? If so, pray. Let’s take a few moments right now for a time of silent prayer.