

Good morning! (impromptu greeting/comments)

Stand for the reading of the gospel.

I remember something from several years ago. My oldest son was about five years old at the time. I was riding my bicycle with him on the back in one of those child seats. We were going down a steep little hill near my house. Jonathan was leaning out to the side so he could look around my waist and see where we were going. I could feel the shift of the balance on the bike. As we went down the hill I used the brakes to slow down. But my son, who was five years old, wasn't sure that I knew what I was doing. He said nervously, "Dad, shouldn't you slow down some?" I had been riding bicycles for years and knew what I was doing, but my five year old son figured he needed to help me out. Interesting....

Even more interesting is that now he's 27 years old and sometimes I ride with him as he drives the car and think, "Jonathan, shouldn't you slow down some?" I think he knows what he's doing...

It comes down to trusting the other person. Jonathan learned to trust me. He learned he didn't need to worry, or be anxious.

This passage that we just read is about trusting God. If you trust God, you won't worry. You won't be anxious. Some English translations use the word anxious, and others the word worry. Five times this passage mentions worry. v. 25 "do not worry about your life; what you will eat or what you will drink." v.27 "Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?" v. 28 "why do you worry about clothes?" v. 31 "do not worry saying, what shall we eat or what shall we drink." v.34 "do not worry about tomorrow."

We probably all worry sometime. I can't remember meeting anyone who never worried. I have met some who don't worry very much, and I've met others who worry lots and lots. Which type are you? Which type do you want to be? You can be worry free. You don't have to worry to make sure everything goes well. In fact worrying doesn't help at all. That's what this passage is saying to us.

This passage states that we are not to worry about the things in life. God knows what we need. Matthew Henry wrote a well known Bible commentary over 300 years ago. He says that if we trust God to take us to heaven when our life on earth is finished, why can't we trust him to take care of us now? Which is easier, to give you a bowl of rice, or to raise you to life after you die? We can trust him for the big things, so we should also trust him for the little things.

It's like a story I heard of a family that was crossing the ocean many years ago. They traveled by ship. They were not rich. They saved money until they had enough to buy passage on the ocean liner. But they didn't have much extra, so they packed food to take along. They thought that way they wouldn't have to pay expensive prices in the ship's restaurant. They had crackers and canned tuna in their cabin everyday. Finally, they were just about to reach the end of the trip. They decided to celebrate by going to the ship's restaurant. When they got there they asked how much it would cost. They were shocked to find out that it was free. Buying the ticket to travel on the ship also covered the cost of eating in the restaurant with its delicious food! They could be enjoying the fine restaurant the whole time, instead of eating crackers and canned food in the cabin.

Taking us to heaven is the big thing. It is like passage on the ship. Meeting our daily needs is also included, like the restaurant food. Don't worry about it! Of course, it is easy to say don't worry, but it is harder to actually not worry.

I should know better, but a little while back I was caught up in worrying. I worried about the economy of

Japan. I worried about some of the European nations that seem to be ready to fail economically. I worried about America, and many problems I see there. Actually, once I get worrying, there always seems to be more things to worry about. There is no end!

Then as I looked out the window, I saw a little bird land nearby. It hopped around, looking this way and that way. Then it hopped up and flew away. It didn't look the least bit worried about finding enough food. And I remembered this passage. It says in verse 26, "Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?" That bird doesn't worry. If God is taking care of the bird, God will take care of me. I don't know what is coming in the future, but I know God will take care of me and you.

Martin Luther said, "I don't know what my future holds, but I know WHO holds my future." It showed his trust in God. He was on trial for his beliefs. He could have been burned alive as punishment. But, he was able to trust God.

There is a major department store chain in America called J.C. Penney. There are over a thousand branch stores. It was started around 1900 by James Cash Penney. At first he was successful, but then he had some financial problems. Mr. Penney was so worried he lost hope. It got so bad that he was put in a mental hospital. One day some Christians came to visit the hospital and have a chapel service. He heard them singing, "God Will Take Care of You" and he realized that it was true. From that day on he had faith in God. He became a Christian. He stopped worrying and was able to leave the hospital. He fully recovered and established a very successful company, gave lots of money to charity and lived to be 95 years old.

So, I think we all agree that we shouldn't worry, that we should trust God. How do we do that?

First, consider the birds, like Jesus said to do. Don't just look at them, but consider them. Think about their life. A bird can't fly from a tree branch to the ground for a seed without God knowing it. In fact God provides for it. Not only did He create the bird, he created the seeds that it eats. He provides the seed for them daily. The birds don't worry. Verse 26 again, "Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them." Is it up to the bird to plan ahead and grow wheat? No, God provides it for them. If God does that for the birds, won't He also take care of you?

Matthew Henry said because birds don't worry, they are the merriest animals around. They sing among the branches. They praise God to the best of their ability. If we were as carefree as they are about what may come in the future, we'd be singing all the time too! It is worry that takes away our joy. It is worry that keeps us from praising God. Look at what He's done already. Don't worry about what He hasn't done yet. It is not time for that. When the time comes He will provide.

The second thing to do to beat worry is the most important. Seek God's kingdom above all else. The best way to make worries about this life go away, is to think about heaven. The more we think about that world (heaven), the more content we are in this world. When I think about living in a mansion in heaven forever, I don't care so much what kind of place I live in now. When I think about walking streets of gold, I don't care about how old of a car I drive on streets of asphalt now. When I think about the joy then, I don't care so much about the problems I face now.

Paul said, for me to live is Christ, and to die is gain!

Hebrews chapter 12 tells us to do this too. Hebrews 12:2 "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."

It says, Look to Jesus our example. He endured the cross. A painful agony of death. He was laughed at and mocked by people. He didn't let that stop him. Why? He did it for the joy that was set before him. Heaven! He could endure the worst situation that could happen because He was looking forward with joy to heaven. Stephen looked to heaven when he was about to be put to death by the angry mob for being a Christian. He said that he saw Jesus standing at the Father's side.

We are to seek God's kingdom and his righteousness before everything else. Let's think about what that means in everyday life. Probably the biggest challenge we face as Christians in this world is remembering who we are. It is easy to think we are just like everyone else. Everyone else is just like us. But that is not true. If you are in Christ, you are a new person. The old you is gone. You were spiritually dead, but now you are alive. You have been made a child of God. You are adopted by him into his family. There is nothing that can take you from him.

How do we remember this? By reviewing it. Our brains leak. We fill them with knowledge and understanding. Then it leaks out. We have to keep reviewing, refilling. We do this through spending time with God's Word, the Bible. Read it, think about it, memorize it, meditate on it. Think, "what does this mean?" Say the words slowly and thoughtfully. Ask God to guide you with his Holy Spirit as you read and learn about him. When you need it, God will help you remember just the right passage. Like I said earlier about me looking out the window when I was worried and seeing the bird and remembering this passage.

Also, keep attending worship services. Hear God's Word preached. When the pastors bring a message to you on Sunday morning, it is after they have spent hours studying it. They meditate on it. Pray for God's guidance in understanding it. And for his blessing in communicating that to you. They may not speak like Billy Graham, or Tony Campolo, but they are put here by God for you.

Sing songs of truth about God. It is amazing how words from songs will come back to us. When we sing we are praising God. We are singing to him. But we are also storing the truth that the songs teach in our minds. Then in the future we will remember them. That is why the words that we sing are important. First they must be truth that agrees with the Bible. Second they must be meaningful to us.

And don't forget, praying is so important in seeking God's kingdom and his righteousness. Prayer is conversing with God. You've read in Genesis how God came to visit Adam and Eve in the cool of the evening. Imagine God walking up and saying, I am here with you. Talk to me. I want to hear what is on your heart. Well, that is sort of what praying is like. It isn't just listing off things we want from God. It is praising him and thanking him for who He is. It is telling him our thoughts and concerns. And often it is being quiet as we wait before him. He quiets our spirit and gives us encouragement. Prayer in the morning is good, noon is good, at night is good, anytime throughout the day. Don't feel like there is a certain time or way you must pray to please God. Just talk to him everyday.

Then live out your life based on the truth from God's Word. When you are living well and obeying God it is a way of praising him. Whether anyone else sees or not, God is aware of what you say and do. In doing our work well we please God. It doesn't matter so much what work God has given you to do, but how you do it. Work as servants of God. The Christian woman who cleans floors is pleasing to God. Not because she sings hymns while she works, but because she does a good job of cleaning. You might be a teacher, or business person, factory worker, McDonald's worker, or whatever. You may not have a job. The job is not as important as how you do it. Work well at what you do, whether it is working at a job, or working at something at home. Do your best always. In Colossians 3:23 and 24 it tells us, "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord."

Though it seems we are working for a company or a business for our income, in reality we are working for the Lord. Work well for him. Don't worry about what you will eat, or drink, or wear, or how you will live when you are older. He will provide for you. Serve him faithfully. He may lead you through various paths, various jobs, and living conditions, but wherever you are He will provide for you. Seek his kingdom and his righteousness with all your heart, and all these things will be given to you as well.

In closing I want to share a true story. I've said there is no need to worry. God will take care of you. It is his word and He doesn't break his word. But I don't want you to think that means that nothing painful will ever happen to you. Sometimes it is through the pain that the greatest benefits come to you. Remember Romans 8:28 "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." This doesn't mean everything is pleasant or even good. Bad things do happen and come our way. But God works in them for good.

I've been reading a book called, "The Good and Beautiful God." In it the author, James Bryan Smith, tells

about his daughter named Madeline.

He and his wife already had a son. His wife was pregnant again and they were looking forward with joy to the birth of their little girl. On a visit to the doctor to check up on the progress of the unborn baby the doctor stunned them with news. The little girl that was eight months along in the womb had a rare chromosomal disorder. She would probably die at birth. There was nothing they could do. He and his wife went home from the doctor in shock. He writes, "How does a person survive this kind of news? How do you move from painting your child's nursery to planning her funeral?"

It turned out that the doctor was partially wrong. Even though the baby had the chromosomal disorder, she survived birth. She was very small, had a heart defect, was deaf and could not keep food down. The doctors then told them she would only survive for a year or two.

He said during that time it felt like he and his wife had been kicked in the stomach – repeatedly. They wondered why this had happened to them. Their daughter lived for two years, then finally her little body gave up the fight.

Listen to what he says in his own words. "A few years after Madeline died I was in the middle of a day of solitude. My mind went over the last few years, thinking about the pain of hearing the news from the doctors, the countless sleepless nights on hospital floors, and the dark and rainy day we placed her body in the earth. I turned to God and said, without thinking, "Maybe it would have been better if she had never been born.

"That was when I received one of the clearest experiences of God responding to me that I've ever had in my life. On this day, at that moment, a little voice penetrated my mind, the voice of a little girl, a voice I had never heard but immediately recognized as Madeline's. 'Daddy, you should never say that. If I had never been born, I would not be here now. I am so happy here in heaven, and one day you and Mom and Jacob will come and see me, and we will live forever together. And there is more good that has happened because of me that you can't see now but will one day understand.'"

People, God does care about you. He knows your needs, and your pains. He will take care of you. He will provide for you and He will bring you through the hard time. Maybe you won't have the clear answer that the father of Madeline had. But take it in faith, God will take care of you and He will work all things together for your good. It may not be obvious in this life what the good is, but you can trust him on it. We have no good reason to worry, and every good reason to trust God.

Let's pray.