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Wonderful, amazing Lord Jesus. We praise you and we thank you for everything you have done in us and through us. We praise you and we thank you for everything that you're going to do. We come before you today to humbly submit to you and your will to learn from you. We ask you now to teach us, speak to our hearts through your Holy Spirit and help us to hear what you're saying. Amen. All right. Well, it's good to be back. I had a bit of a break. I had a month off while Keith was here and then I had a week back and then I've had two weeks gone because we had Carl Hinkle and we had Bob and Hope Carter. In that meantime, some of you heard in monthly meeting and stuff that I found a job. Since Keith is coming in and I'm going to be needing to find work after he takes over, I found a job with a local company and it's great because it lets me stay here in town and the workload is not so much that I can't prepare sermons in the evening and keep preaching on Sunday morning. So it looks like I'll be able to stay here until Keith arrives and I'm happy about that. Praise God. Amen. Yeah. So I was praying. I said, "God, what message? What should we talk about at church this Sunday?" He started showing to me how the past couple of years as I've been here and sharing with you guys that he's been tilling the soil here and fantastic. That's the start of something good. He has been turning our hearts towards him and his mission. I feel like he's brought us to a new level of maturity. I hope you feel that way. I feel that way. But something I thought of as I was looking at this is that when you come to a new level of maturity, there's sometimes risk involved with that. There's that risk that your newfound maturity, your newfound wisdom goes to your head. And many of you have had kids go off to college and on their very first fall break back home, suddenly they know everything. And you can't tell them anything anymore because they've learned something new and suddenly they're experts and wow. That word sophomore means wise fool. I think that's a perfect description of the situation that a lot of people find themselves in when they hit that new knowledge or that new maturity. Suddenly they just kind of run wild with their opinion of themselves and their abilities. And so I want to just toss out a little warning that God is maturing us and stuff. And we need to just be careful that we don't develop that same attitude. Something Bob Carter said to me really stuck out last week. I hope you were here for that. He just had an amazing message. And I've burned a couple CDs. They're out there. You can pick them up and I can make more if we need them. But one of the things that he said that really stuck out was the story of coming before the chief. He talked about in Africa how these tribes, they have chiefs. And if you are summoned before the chief, you come in and you sit down and you listen to everything he has to say for as long as he has to say. And you do not say to the chief, "Look, this is great. I got to get going. I'm sorry. We'll see you later." And what he was talking about, he said, a metaphor for how sometimes Christians can act towards God. In our prayer time, in our quiet time, sometimes we come before God and it's like, "Ah, well, you know, God, thanks, but I got to get to my day." And it's like, "It's the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords." And we're saying, "Sorry, I don't have time to sit and listen." And when God leads us deeper into maturity, this is the risk we run. For a long time, probably since I've been coming back to this church since I came back to Indiana, we've had a lot of talk about the worries about our future, the worries about our future at this church. There's been worries about how many people attend. There's been worries about money and that sort of thing. And I believe that God latched on to those worries. We turned to him because of these worries and he drew us to him and he spoke to us. He showed us that when you come close to him, he comes close to you and that he will teach you and he will comfort you and he will take care of you. But I think that the message that God has for us today is that now is the season of faith. The season of faith is where we now leave all that worrying stuff behind. No more worrying about money, no more worrying about attendance, no more worrying about the future, no more worry. God has shown us as we've grown and as we've matured, God has shown us that he is there, that he is real, and that he takes care of us. And I think he wants us to grow and mature further, but in order to do that, we need to start letting go of some of that doubts and worries that brought us to him in the first place. We need to start trusting that he is who the Bible says he is. That he is Jehovah Jireh, our provider. The season of faith is the time where we hand off our worries to God and refocus our energy on simply being who he wants us to be and doing what he wants us to do. First Peter five, seven says cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. And the season of faith is the time where we step out in faith and believe that verse and other verses. He cares for me. He cares for us. So I'm just going to cast my anxiety on him. My worries about this and that and the other for this church in my own life and whatever, whatever areas of my life, anxiety and worry and turmoil has come. I'm casting all of that onto him because I'm in faith. I'm believing what the Bible says. He cares for me. He cares for us. In other words, he worries on your behalf, so you don't have to worry. Isn't that nice? If I was rich enough, you know, I would hire someone to worry for me. I think take care of that for me. He's like, were you able to take care of it? Yes, awesome. That's why I'm paying you. If not, I'll hire someone else. It's just nice to be able to hand off your worries and God says you can hand off your worries to me. We leave our worries behind or more specifically, we have faith that he is in control. Matthew 16. Verse 18 says, and I tell you that you are Peter. This is Jesus speaking of Peter and on this rock, I will build my church and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. Notice what he says there. This is Jesus speaking. He says, I will build my church. I will build it, says Jesus, not on this rock. You will build it. The idea that that that we have to worry about the church being built is we're worrying about someone else's job. And I'm sure some of you have experienced that in your working careers when when someone worries about a job that's not there to worry about stuff gets messed up. What we need to do is is let Jesus handle what is his to handle. This is his church. We are his people. We're his. His to take care of his to grow his to build. And his love and his might, which are indescribable, are more than sufficient to take care of us. More than sufficient for us to abandon our worry and to begin to walk in joy. Ezekiel going Old Testament Ezekiel 37 starting in verse one. This is Ezekiel talking about himself, something that happened to him. He was a prophet. He said, the hand of the Lord was upon me and he brought me out by the spirit of the Lord and set me in the middle of a valley. It was full of bones. He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry. He asked me, Son of man, can these bones live? I said, Oh, sovereign Lord, you alone know. And and that response was a response of faith. That's the response we need to have when it comes to to the future of this church. God, you alone know you know you are in control. And we trust you. Can we live like that? Oh, God, you know. God, you know, the Bible gives us instructions for many things. But but never does it tell us to worry. And in fact. The Bible now never gives instructions on on here's how to increase church attendance or here's how to increase giving. The Bible doesn't give us instructions for those kinds of things because that's not our concern. But what the Bible gives us instructions for is here's how to love. Here's how to serve. God calls us to love and serve. And as far as the organization and everything, he says, leave that to me. You focus individually and corporately on love and serve. And if you were just obedient in these two simple things, watch what I can do with you. Watch what I can do with you if you will just love and serve. We were never called to worry about anything just to love and to serve. First Corinthians one chapter. Chapter one. Yes, that's why I said first Corinthians one first Corinthians one verse 18. Starting in verse 18. For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing. But to us who are being saved, it is the power of God. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, the intelligence of the intelligent. I will frustrate. Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in wisdom in the wisdom of God, the world through its wisdom did not know him. God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified. Stumbling block to the Jews foolishness to the Gentiles. But to those whom God has called both Jews and Greeks Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength. Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards. Not many were influential. Not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise. He chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of the world and the despised things and the things that are not to nullify the things that are so that no one may boast before him. It is because of him you are in Christ Jesus who has become for us wisdom from God. That is our righteousness holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written, let him who boasts boast in the Lord. You see the wisdom of this world. Comes into a church like this and says, oh, you better worry about that. Oh, you're not looking too good in that area. You better fix that up. Better form a committee. Maybe see if you can send someone off to a training seminar. Oh, you guys are in trouble. You, oh, man, all these numbers. Ah, that's what the wisdom of the world says. And I love the fact that our Finance Committee has, they've asked for our budgets. They've asked the other boards for the budget for next year, but they've also asked for basically a faith budget. They're saying start your brainstorming. Start thinking about the amazing things this church is going to do and write the budget that you need to do those things. That's that season of faith right there. That's that's faith. Our Heavenly Father calls us to be his children and he sits us on his lap and he hugs away our fear. And he says, and now go and love, go serve. I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Don't worry. Just go and do. Just go and do. I'm with you. And and when we're out there loving and serving, we're still going to be doing the things that will attract people and all that. But we won't be doing it out of worry or fear. We'll be doing those things, the VBS and the Trunkertree and the youth group and all that stuff. We'll be doing it because that's who we're called to be and that's what we're called to do. We're called to be light in this world, light in the darkness. And if we can bring light through VBS, then so be it. That's why we do it and we don't we don't do it because we're worried or afraid. And it will bring us joy when we finally become who we were meant to be living in that freedom. I'm always reminded how much darkness is out there in the world. How much darkness is in people's lives. And we are called to step into that darkness and to plant the cross of Christ and say no more. We can't do that if we're stuck in worry. We have to hold on in faith to the promises that the faithful God has given us even if we don't see them yet. God says victory. God says healing. God says deliverance. You don't always see it right away, but the season of faith is you believe it right away and you act as if it's true right now. You know, in all the years we've been here, 181 years now, God has never let us down. Never once. Why are we worrying that he's suddenly going to have a change of character? That's just not him. He is the same yesterday, today and forever. Will his faithfulness run out? Will his goodness run out? Absolutely not. When Keith is here, he spent a whole month on the importance of prayer in relation to what God wants to do with this church. And I cannot emphasize that point enough. You know, God has blessings in store that he wants to give to us, but that he tells us unlock through prayer. Unlock through obedience, unlock through faith. There's so much in store and it is through faith and prayer and obedience that we unlock and access all that God has for it. And worry is the opposite of faith, which means worry is the opposite of the key that unlocks all that God has in store for us. We need serious, dedicated prayer to unlock what God has in store, but please don't waste your prayers begging for people to fill the pews, begging for the money, for the electricity. Instead, pray for opportunities to serve. Pray for opportunities to love. Don't pray for things that God says he's taken care of. Pray for things that he's giving you to do. Love and serve. Opportunities to do those things. Prays that our eyes will be open and that our hearts will be broken for the needs around us. I am shamed when I think of how many of my prayers really just amount to God work harder. When so few of my prayers are, God, give me more to do. That can fix me. I'm ashamed of how busy I can get to being in the business of looking too busy to do anything else. I've taken the time that I should be out there just loving and serving and filled it up with easy to do, meaningless, busy work. You can't relate to that. [pause] I'm sorry, I'm pausing a lot because I don't have as much time to work on these during the week, so they're not quite as fleshed out as they'd normally be. It may be hard for you to let go of some of your wonderful plans that you have on how you're going to save this church. But today the message is save yourself from that. That idea that you have to save this church, let go of that. Save yourself from that. It's God's church, and he's more than capable of saving it. Instead, let go of the worry and begin to walk in the joy and the freedom of your new identity in Christ. Find out what it is that God has called you to be and do. This new life, you are a new creation. You are someone who goes into darkness and brings light. I hope that that stirs your heart. It stirs my heart. I believe it's written on the heart of every human being. I think that's why we watch these movies about heroes, and we are so touched and moved because God has called us to be heroes. He's called us to be light bringers in this world. He's called us to be champions against darkness, not worry-warts. So walk in the joy of loving and serving and being who you were created to be, free from worry. We were called to work. We were not called to worry. Some of you know my grandfather, my mom's dad. He was an Olympic athlete, world record holder. When he was back in college at IU running track, whenever someone would get injured, like spraying or something, the coach would just say, "Just keep running, because whatever put it in is going to take it out." Many years later, it turns out that he learned that expression from training horses. When you're training a horse and a horse gets injured, you keep running the horse, because that's how they work out whatever injury they have had. He just treated his college athletes the same way. I know there's that tendency when you feel wounded or hurt, you just kind of want to curl up and block out the world and everything, but the great physician says, "No, you need to walk this one out. You need the therapy. You need physical therapy. You can't just curl up and expect to get better that way. That's not how this works. Instead, you need to step into the new life, the new creation, the new joy of love and service." That is what it means now for us as we enter the season of faith. As we have our time of open worship now, I ask you just to look at the things that you've been worrying about, things that aren't yours to worry about. If you have things that really, truly are yours to worry about, God wants to take those away from you too. He wants you to take those burdens. So cast all your anxiety on Him, whether it's real or something you've made up in your head. Take this opportunity now just to say, "God, I give it all up to you. I trust that you're going to take care of me. I trust that you're big enough to take and handle my worries." So let's spend that time now with Him. Everyone, we are a family. And I love this family so much and God loves this family so much. And if you are at all apprehensive about what God is calling us to, just remember, we are going as a team. None of us is called to do anything I just talked about alone. None of us is called to do this just in our own strength. We are called to support one another and lift each other up, to pray for each other and encourage each other, and to fill in the gaps of each other's weaknesses. And it's going to be so beautiful when we're doing it as a team because we're going to be amazing. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, help us to comprehend what it means that we are new creations. Help us to grasp our new identity. Help us to discover the joy that comes from the love and the service you have called us to perform. Help us to realize that it's not a burden, that it is actually a life-giving change of creation that you have put into our hearts. It is new life. It is our destiny. It is what we're created to do. Help us to understand, help us to believe and step out in faith and to trust every single promise that is written in this Bible about you and about us. Bring these verses back to our memory. Help us to understand our new identity and help us to understand who you are and why we can absolutely, completely trust you in this season of faith. We pray all this in the name of your Son Jesus. Amen.