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GOOD MORNING/INVOCATION – Bobby and Hannah Schuller

BS: This is the day the Lord has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it. Good morning.

HS: I just want to say that God loves you so deeply. Isaiah 43 says, "Do not fear for I have redeemed you. I have summoned you by name. You are mine." Turn around and shake the hand of the person next to you and say God loves you and so do I.

BS: Well good morning, everyone. Today I'm taking a break from preaching. We have the joy of having John Ortberg in the house, preaching this morning, so what a thrill that will be. And we just believe you're going to leave here full of joy.

Let's pray together: Father, we love you and we thank you that you love us, and that you care for us, and that you love us just as we are and not as we should be. And we pray, God, in Jesus' name that your kingdom would envelope everything we do. We take the crowns off our head and we lay them before your throne, and we pray, God that your effective will would be at work in our lives. We're at peace today and we're trusting you; we're living by faith, in Jesus' name we pray, amen.

HS: Amen.

SCRIPTURE – Mark 1:14-15 – Hannah Schuller

In preparation for John's message, the words of our Lord found in Mark 1:14:

After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee proclaiming the good news. The time has come, he said, the kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!

Church family, we get to live together in the presence of God. Amen.

INTERVIEW – JOHN ORTBERG

BS: Well today we have such a joy to have John Ortberg in the house. You know, I think every preacher has their favorite preacher. John is my favorite preacher and I mean that sincerely. I've been listening to your podcasts for years, and it's amazing what John has been able to accomplish at Menlo Park Presbyterian, right down the street from Stanford University. He's been able to have a major influence in that whole area of technology and what people are doing.

John is so accessible, too, with the influence that he has to pastors like me. I still remember the first time I met John, he agreed to meet me over a cup of coffee! And I asked him for preaching advice, and I still remember what you said, John. Two things: I forget which philosopher it was, but I still remember what the point was. Always think about what do you want them to feel, what do you want them to understand and what do you want them to do. So I always do that in every sermon.

And the second was, read a lot but don't read for your sermons. Just read, and then it'll work its way into your sermon. So this man has had a great influence on our ministry, and we share a joint love for Dallas Willard, too, which you'll hear so much of what he's saying is what I'm saying. Would you please welcome with me Pastor John Ortberg. John hi!

JO: Thank you.

BS: So great to have you.

JO: Thanks. You're too gracious. Thank you.

BS: Awesome.

JO: Thanks. Thank you.

BS: One of the reasons we're here is this church is so excited about your new book.

JO: Thank you. If you want to just keep talking about me, go ahead. It feels really good. So I was like.. so fine.

BS: Well before you preach today, we're going to talk a little bit about your book *Eternity is Now in Session*. And of course this is really important to your message, isn't it. Tell me a little bit about why you wrote this book.

JO: Well that phrase, eternity is now in session comes from somebody who was very influential on both of us, Dallas Willard. And Dallas taught philosophy for many years at the University of Southern California. Brilliant philosopher, brilliant mind. Smartest guy I've ever known. I used to joke I would never get in an argument with Dallas because I was afraid he would prove I don't exist. And he used to talk about things like eternity. Dallas had just thought through words that all of us throw around, but often don't think about. And often we think eternity is something that is going on that you have to die before you can get in on it. And he would say no, eternity is going on right now. Eternal life, another one of those religious phrases that gets used a lot, is defined in the Bible only one time, and that's in the gospel of John, chapter 17, where Jesus is praying to His Father and says "this is eternal life that they," that people you and I, "might know the Father." And so the idea is that eternity is going on right now, and we can enter into an interactive participative relationship with God in our real lives on this planet right now. We can be part of eternity today.

BS: I remember he used to use the phrase I really liked that helped communicate that idea. He used to say eternal living. Tell me about eternal living. Like I think there's a lot of people here that, it feels like.. the other thing he used to say is a lot of Christians think the fruit of Christianity is more Christians. And I think there's a lot of people, especially that grew up in church that maybe had that mountaintop experience with the Lord, feel like no matter what they do, no matter how many times they go to church, they don't feel that eternal life.

JO: Yes.

BS: What can I do? I mean I experienced this as a pastor. Many people here, believers who love the Lord, feel that dry place in their lives and they want eternal living. What can we do today? What's the easiest thing we can do?

JO: Dallas was the kind of guy who had a thousand different phrases for those of us who knew him and loved him. One of them is he would say I'm quite sure that God will allow everyone into heaven who can possibly stand it. Because a lot of us have kind of cartoon pictures of heaven, but the idea is heaven is about being with God. And now I have to become the kind of person who actually wants to be with God, and I would say for anybody who wants that, begin right here, surrender your life to God as sincerely as you can.

BS: Oh, that's good.

JO: That one simple prayer, "your will be done in my life." That was Jesus' core prayer. People who are trapped in addictions, surrender is always the first step. And that's a wonderful prayer to pray at any moment. Whatever is going on, whether you are happy, sad, successful, failing at something, any moment, every time you think of it, that prayer: God your will be done, I surrender to you, and God, I believe, always honors that prayer.

BS: If you want that great experience in your life, get this book *Eternity is Now in Session*. You guys want to hear more? Ladies and gentlemen, John Ortberg. John, thank you. Love you.

JO: Thank you. Thanks.

MESSAGE – John Ortberg "Eternity is Now in Session"

For a whole bunch of reasons, I'm just incredibly honored to be here. I heard Robert Schuller preach when I was a student at Wheaton College for the first time, a long time ago. Came out to California to go to Fuller Theological Seminary, and went to this amazing place called the Crystal Cathedral, and that was remarkable. And then the chance to get to know Bobby. Aren't you glad that God thought up Bobby Schuller and his heart and ministry and love for people? And the opportunity to spread the good news about Jesus all around the world. And then just one other thing, speaking quite personally, I love music. Is the music this good every week here? Oh my goodness. I hope you never take for granted. I can't think of many churches where a choir will sing and people stand up and applaud afterwards. And then the strings play and people stand up and applaud afterwards? I finished speaking after the last service and nobody did anything, so don't get your hopes up.

I'm thrilled to be here. And I can't even tell you how excited I am to get to talk about what we're going to talk about over these next moments, because I believe this is the most important subject in the entire world. It's what Jesus came to teach and to bring, and it's the greatest offer ever given to human kind.

And I want to start with a question, because it involves a word 'gospel' that gets thrown around a lot. I talk about this in that little book *Eternity is Now in Session*. But a lot of people haven't thought deeply about what is the gospel.

So I want to start with this question. If somebody were to ask you, 'what's the gospel that Jesus came to preach' what would you say? Not just what do you think of by the word gospel, but if somebody were to ask you. Now Jesus had a gospel. If somebody were to ask you 'what gospel did Jesus come to proclaim.' If you don't mind for a moment, turn to the person next to you and just take a shot at it. If you're at home, you might just think about this for a moment, but for everybody that's here, just turn to the person next to you. If somebody were to ask you what's the gospel Jesus came to preach, what would you say?

Now this sounds like a terribly simple question, but I can tell you from quite a lot of experience, the vast majority of people not only outside but very often in churches, do not give the same answer to this question that Jesus Himself gave, and it matters immensely. So, Jesus had one message at the start of His ministry and it's at the beginning of the gospel of Mark, the beginning of Luke and beginning of Matthew summarize His message almost in precisely the same way. This is the summary of His message at the beginning of His ministry. "After John," that's John the Baptist "was put into prison, Jesus went out into Galilee proclaiming the good news of God. 'The time has come,' he said. 'The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news.'"

Now the good news is where we get our word gospel. And what Jesus says constitutes it is that this thing called the kingdom of God has come near. Once He chose His disciples, Jesus adopted a strategy to communicate His one message to everybody that He could. We read about this in Luke chapter 8. "After this," after He chose His disciples, "Jesus traveled about from one town to another proclaiming the good news, the gospel of the kingdom of God." That it's come near.

And then He sends His disciples out, because He's very passionate about this message, and He instructs them to proclaim one message. "When Jesus had called the twelve together, He gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases, and He sent them out to preach the kingdom of God."

Then He's crucified. And when He rose from the dead, He gathered His little group of now eleven disciples together, and He talked to them about one topic. This is from the book of Acts. "Jesus appeared to them over a period of forty days, and spoke about the kingdom of God."

And then the very last glimpse of the church that we get in the book of Acts, the last verse in the last chapter, it's Paul who's in chains now for the gospel, and we're told Acts chapter 28: "Boldly and without hindrance, He preached the kingdom of God."

So if you were going to say what Jesus' gospel is about in one phrase, what would that phrase be? The kingdom of God. The good news, the gospel, is simply this – the kingdom of God has become available on earth for ordinary human beings like you and me to live in. It is here right now. Eternity is now in session, and you can live in it if you want to. That's what Jesus came to proclaim.

And He taught a lot about how to do that, but that was the news. And here's what I believe to be terribly tragic. In our day, for a variety of reasons in thousands of churches, millions of Christians have substituted another gospel for Jesus' gospel, and this is what I think is often the substitute gospel. People think of the gospel as here are the minimal entrance requirements for getting into heaven when you die. And we don't put it in exactly that language, but that's what people often think.

I'll give you a picture I sometimes use for this 'not the real gospel.' There's a scene towards the end of a movie that all of you are way too spiritual to ever have seen called Monty Python and the Holy Grail? Oh this is my kind of crowd. So towards the end of that movie, Arthur and three of his knights are trying to get into a castle where the grail is, but there's an abyss between them and the castle, and you got to cross a bridge to get over, and there's this wizened old weird bridge keeper, and he'll only let you cross the bridge if you can answer three questions correctly. If you get one wrong, you get cast down into the abyss. That's the end of you.

So the first knight comes up, and he's asked what's your name, what's your quest, and what's your favorite color. He answers that, he gets to cross the bridge. Second knight's quite cocky, and he's asked state your name, state your quest, what he does, and then he's asked some real obscure question like who won the world cup in 1948. I don't know. Ah! And he's cast down into the abyss.

So the third knight now is quite nervous. State your name, state your quest, he does, and then he's asked state your favorite color, he says red, no blue. Ah! And he's thrown down into the abyss.

So now there's just Arthur left. Comes up and the bridge keeper asks him, state your name: Arthur King of the Britain's. Quest: search the holy grail. And then he's asked a question. There's kind of a running gag through the whole movie: what's the wing speed velocity of a coconut laden swallow. And his answer is also part of that running gag: that depends, is it an African swallow or a European swallow and the bridge keeper says, I don't know. Ah! And the bridge keeper is cast down to the abyss.

Now for a variety of reasons, we don't have time to get into, many people have reduced the gospel to this idea that when you die, there will be the castle, that'll be the good place, and then there's this abyss, and then there's this bridge, and the gospel is the correct answer to the secret question such that if you give it, they have to let you cross. The gospel is understood by many people outside the church and in to be this quite exclusive, quite cognitive minimal entrance requirements for getting allowed into heaven when you die.

A lot of people think of saving faith. That's a phrase you might have heard of if you've been around church very much. They think of saving faith as what do you have to affirm at minimum so they cannot keep you out of heaven. Here's the problem: where in the New Testament, if you've read it much, where does Jesus ever say now I'm going to give you the minimal entrance requirements for getting into heaven when you die. He never says anything like that. And yet tragically for millions of people, that's what they think they've got. And then they have arguments over exactly what are those requirements and so. Jesus never says anything like that.

What He says is no, all the preliminaries have been taken care of. And the kingdom of God is now accessible to every human being, no matter what you have done, how irreligious you think that you are, so review your plans for living and base your strategy of life on this remarkable opportunity. That's the gospel of Jesus. That's His call.

Now of course, of course, of course it includes the promise of the forgiveness of our sins, purchased at the cost of His life on the cross as a free gift of grace; of course it does. Of course it includes the promise that death will not interrupt eternal life, but it will go on of course as it would with our heavenly Father forever, but it includes more than that. Jesus came as the kingdom bringer. Many people think the only real reason why Jesus came to earth was to die on the cross to get us over to the other side. The cross was fundamental. His death was fundamental, but they were simply one part of His overall mission. His great mission was to be the kingdom bringer. It is now here.

He was speaking in the Sermon on the Mount, the most famous talk ever given one time to a group of people, and they believe in God, but like us, they tend to fritter their lives away on concerns that don't really matter. What am I going to eat? What am I going to wear? How am I going to look? How much money will I have? Will I have a big enough house? Will my career look good? Will I get in the right office? And He says don't waste your life running after those things for the pagans run after all those things. People who don't know God. And your heavenly Father knows you need them. "But seek first His kingdom, seek first His kingdom, and His righteousness."

Now righteousness is another one of those words that's become badly misunderstood. It's often thought to be kind of self-righteous or holier than thou. It is simply what it is that makes somebody good from the inside. We can never get away from that driving need to know – am I a good person? And righteousness has a wonderful history behind it, and Jesus uses it in deeply thoughtful ways to be a truly authentically good person. Seek that and all these things will be given to you.

His one gospel was the gospel of the availability of the kingdom. His one purpose was to manifest, to actually model with His life, His body, His words, the presence of the kingdom on earth. His one command was to pursue life in the kingdom above all else. His one plan was for His followers to extend the kingdom. And yet millions of people who name His name could not tell you what the kingdom is.

So let's spend a few moments on that because this is His message, the one we follow. One of the difficulties for us is we don't use the word kingdom often. We have a different form of government. We don't have a king. So think about it like this: every human being has a kingdom in a Biblical sense. Your kingdom is that little sphere in which what you say goes. Right? Your kingdom is where you are in charge. The technical language for this is your kingdom is the range of your affective will. Where your will can rule. And people very early on learn they were made to have a kingdom; to reign. That's why we do not like to have someone else tell us what we have to do. What is a two-year-olds favorite word? "No!" What's their second favorite word? "Mine!" Those are kingdom words, see. Now they can be irritating for parents but it's a real good thing that a two-year-old is like that because they're learning they have a will and what a precious thing that is. What an amazing, marvelous gift it is.

Two and a half months ago, my wife and I had our first grandchild. His name is Chance and there's a long story behind him that I won't tell you, but I cannot describe to you the joy. If I knew having grandchildren was this good, I would have skipped having children. Gone right to it. And anybody knows when a little child is born, and then they begin to develop and they learn how to walk, and they learn how to talk, and how to move their hands, that that's a miracle. What's happening? A little piece of matter, a little piece of atoms is being reigned by a will, see, by a personal will. Our universe is subject to will, to personhood. That's a remarkable thing. That's a supernatural and we see it all the time, we just get used to it.

And little kids grow up, and they start being concerned for their kingdom. They get in the backseat of a car with each other, and they draw a line – you better not cross over this line because this is my kingdom. And they start defending their kingdoms. They have little kingdom wars in the back seat of the van. And then dad starts turning around because whose kingdom does dad think the car is? He thinks it's his kingdom! And he sends his hand back there like a snake. You kids want me to come around? And the kids retreat to the corner of the van. Friend of mine has advice on how to get kids out of the unreachable safety zone – a tap on the brakes brings them right into play. Thy kingdom come.

My kingdom is the range of my effective will. It is where things go the way I want them to go, beginning with my body. And this is why our bodies are so important. This is why they matter so deeply, why they matter so deeply to God, and why we treasure the little bodies of our children, and of other people, and having bodies treated with dignity makes so much difference. They're where our kingdoms begin and that's a fabulous thing.

Having a kingdom is a real good thing. It is what God made you for. And then you're able to extend your kingdom through your words, through your influence, through money. That's one of the reasons why money is such a terribly important and terribly spiritual subject because its one of the primary ways that kingdoms reign of the will gets extended.

And this is all part of God's plan for you. Genesis chapter 1 verse 26 we're told: "Then God said, let us make human beings in our own image, according to our likeness, and let them have dominion." See that's kingdom language. God has dominion. God has a kingdom. God speaks and it is so. And then He makes these odd little human creatures but we're in His image and we get to exercise dominion in our own limited ways. That's a real good thing. That's part of being in the image of God.

But our kingdoms get all junked up by sins. No. Mine. Now on earth, all those little kingdoms intersect and merge, and they form larger kingdoms. We think about it like this – a kingdom is a system of personal power. A kingdom, in the Biblical sense, is a system of personal power. And they come together and they form marriages, and then families, and then neighborhoods, and then schools, and companies, and nations, and cultures, and civilizations, and those are all kingdoms. And all those together form what we might call the kingdom of earth, if we were going to use Biblical language.

So let's do a little study in contrast for a moment. Jesus says that there is an entity; it is a reality that is called the kingdom of God. Now of course that language had been used for a long time in Israel, so Jesus is using language that's very familiar to people. But the idea, and much of what Jesus did, was to try to correct people's vision of what is life like in that kingdom.

And He says it is unspeakably good. To what shall I compare the kingdom of God. It's like a man who finds a treasure buried in the field, and in his great joy, he sells everything he's got because he says I've got to have that treasure.

To what shall I compare the kingdom of God? I met my wife many years ago now in Southern California. We met on a blind date when I was working at a church in La Crescenta California. And after the end of the date, the people that introduced us lived two thousand miles away. This was before cell phones. Didn't seem like a real suave thing to ask Nancy for her number, so the only thing that I knew about her, the only way I knew to get in touch with her again was to call her church. She attended a church, at the time, called Whittier Area Baptist Fellowship.

And so I called that church and I said I'm a pastor, I work at First Baptist Church at La Crescenta. I need the phone number of one your parishioners. It's kind of a ministry thing. Her name is Nancy Berg. And the receptionist put me on hold for a long time. Finally came back on and gave me Nancy's phone number. What I did not know then, and didn't find out for another six months, was the receptionist at that church was Nancy's mother, Verna Berg. And she actually put me on hold and called Nancy up and said there's some guy and he wants your phone number. Shall I give it to him? To what shall I compare the kingdom of God? It is like a man who meets a woman and he wants her phone number so desperately that he calls up a church and semi deceives them just to get it. That's the kingdom of God.

Paul says to the church at Rome, "For the kingdom of God is not a legalistic matter of eating or drinking rules, but righteousness that is true inner goodness, joy and peace." The kingdom of God is where all is as God wants it to be. Jesus says it's like a banquet where the lame and the blind and the poor, people that normally get left out, all get invited, all become guests of honor. That's life in the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is like a little child who's just humble. No big shots, no egos. That's life in the kingdom of God. It's going on right now. The gospel of Jesus, the good news is not that the kingdom has come into existence, it has always existed. The good news is, through Jesus, it's now become available. And not just to Israel but to anybody. It's breaking its boundaries, okay? That's the kingdom of God.

And then there is this other entity and if we were going to use Biblical language for it, we would say it is the kingdom of earth. Every human life and all of our systems of power and governments and politics, how are things going on the kingdom of earth? Not so good. Tragedies, tens of thousands of little children die every day of malnutrition when it's preventable, and lots of have a lot of resources that could change that. Abuse. Corruption. Misuse of power. Me too. Families breaking apart. People being neglected. People not being loved because of the way they look or the color of their skin. Politics in office places. It's a mess.

So Jesus has this plan, see. Now when I was growing up in church, I always thought that the idea was that we were going to go up to heaven someday, and so we ought to just pray: it's such a mess down here. God, get me out of here and get me up there. There's an old TV show called Star Trek? And if somebody was in trouble, they would always pray to the same guy named Scottie. Anybody remember that? Remember what the prayer was? Beam me up. Get me out of here and let me go.

And I kind of thought that was the idea. God, it's a mess down, here. You're going to come and torch this place. Jesus has a real different idea. And I don't know why I didn't understand this. The Lord's Prayer. We said this a little while ago. These words that are so familiar to so many people, and yet so often we've never actually thought about them.

A guy named Ken Davis wrote about back in the 1980's a chapel service for the Chicago Bears. They had a Super Bowl team. Mike Ditka was the coach. And the guy leading the service wanted them to pray the Lord's Prayer, and so he asked Refrigerator Perry to pray the Lord's Prayer. Some of you guys might remember the fridge? Jim McMahon was the quarterback, and he thought this was hilarious. He said to the chaplain, I will bet you \$50 there's no way the fridge knows the Lord's Prayer. And the chaplain thought well that's kind of odd to bet on the Lord's Prayer, but you know it's a football team, okay.

Everybody bows their heads, closed their eyes. The fridge begins to pray: now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep. Jim McMahon takes out \$50, hands it over and says, I was sure he didn't know the Lord's Prayer.

You all know the words: our Father who is in heaven. Now heaven is not some place way out there, far away. The kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of God is the range of God's effective will. Our Father who is closer than the air we breathe, hallowed be your name. May people come to cherish and revere what a good God you are. May you become famous and beloved. Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be your name. And then the next words that for some reason, for so many years, I never really thought of. Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Here's Jesus' message, not I want to tell you how to get from down there to up here. I want to tell you up here is coming down there. Up here, oh God, oh God, oh God, oh God, your kingdom come. Your will be done. In my body. In my mind. In my thoughts. I surrender to you. God, just take this body. It's not worth much and it's getting older every day. Take this body and make it radiant with your presence.

And then in my home. God, where so often your will doesn't reign. Where anger reigns, or coldness reigns, or apathy reigns, or selfishness reigns, or deceits reign. God, in my home, may your kingdom come.

And then in this church. You all look like such wonderful people. Do you all pretty much have virtue nailed down and character? But you know in our hearts, we all carry scars and wounds like you can't believe. We all do. It's our story. What might happen if God's will were done in this church, and wherever you are, when you're watching in your life, see this is God's plan. In your office, in your neighborhood, in our country. Would anybody like for God's will to be done in our country? I know this is not like a church where you talk back, but can I get an amen for like.. would it be a wonderful thing if God's kingdom were to come for our country?

See up there is coming down here. This is the divine conspiracy and it's happening through Jesus. And very often, it happens most in people who are least visible, who look quite humble, are unimportant, but every time somebody has some resources and they get generous with it, or every time somebody gets hurt and they end up forgiving somebody, or every time a workaholic parent says, no I'm going to not do that. I'm going to love my children.

Or every time somebody crosses racial lines to express reconciliation, or every time somebody cares, serves in areas like homelessness, or somebody who is suffering. Every time that happens, up there is coming down here. And now, you are called to be not just somebody who has satisfied the minimal entrance requirements for getting into heaven when you die. You are to be an agent of the kingdom, so follow Him. Follow Him fully. Love Him. Learn what He taught. Do what He said. Lean on His power. Live in His love. Be a part of the greatest movement in human history up there coming down here.

Would you pray together with me? Now heavenly Father, I pray for everybody listening to my voice that they would come to know you. Not just believe certain things about you. Not just try to engage in a transaction that will take care of them after they die. To know you, to enter into eternity right now, right here. We pray it again: our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven starting with us, in Jesus' name, amen.

BOBBY SCHULLER THANK YOU TO JOHN ORTBERG

BS: Wasn't John great? Did you enjoy his sermon? And more than anything, I just hope you know that you are so loved. That despite what you have gone through, your challenges, your pain, that God loves you, and your best days are ahead of you. We want you to leave here so full of joy and hope, and that this week would be just a week full of energy, and so I just pray that over you this morning.

BENEDICTION – Bobby Schuller

BS: And now the Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you. The Lord lift His countenance upon you and give you His peace in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, amen.