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Hour of Power, 01.12.2019

GOOD MORNING – Bobby Schuller (BS) and Hannah Schuller (HS)

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

HS: Welcome church family. We are happy to have you here and to be with you. We love you. Today we hope you leave embracing the reality of your trials, but with absolute faith that with God you will succeed in the end. Turn around and shake the hand of the person next to you and say God loves you and so do I.

BS: We're so glad you're here and hey man, nobody does Christmas like our church and we're so glad you're here as we begin the advent season. Today's the first Sunday of advent which is a time of looking forward to Christmas. It's also a time when as a church we sort of join the waiting of our ancestors, that is those who in the Old Testament were waiting for the coming of Christ and we align our hopes and dreams with theirs, believing that what we're hoping for, what we're dreaming for that God is still working on it. Amen? And so we're going to rebuild those dreams today and hopefully leave here full of joy and fresh vision.

Lord, we come to you in Jesus' name, and I ask that your Holy Spirit would come and move in the minds and the hearts of those who are under the sound of my voice. And I pray, Lord that you would teach us what it means to keep our dreams alive. Lord, we thank you that Christ came and gave His life for us that we could be redeemed unto you. And Lord we love you. It's in Jesus' name we pray, amen.

SCRIPTURE – Genesis 3:8-15 – Hannah Schuller

In preparation for Bobby's message, the words of our Lord found Genesis 3:8:

Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as He was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord among the trees of the garden.

But the Lord God called to the man - where are you? He answered - I heard you in the garden and I was afraid because I was naked so I hid. And He said who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from? The man said the woman you put here with me, she gave me some fruit from the tree and I ate it.

Then the Lord God said to the woman what is this you have done? The woman said the serpent deceived me and I ate. So the Lord God said to the serpent because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and all wild animals. You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and hers. He will crush your head and you will strike his heel.

And church, God fulfilled this promise when He crushed the head of the snake Satan through His son Jesus Christ. God always does what He says and He will bring you to victory, as well. Amen.

DECLARATION – Bobby Schuller

We're so glad you're here. Would you stand with me? We're going to say this creed together. Hold your hands out like this as a way of receiving from the Lord. Let's say this together: I'm not what I do. I'm not what I have. I'm not what people say about me. I am the beloved of God. It's who I am. No one can take it from me. I don't have to worry, I don't have to hurry, I can trust my friend Jesus and share His love with the world.

MESSAGE – Bobby Schuller "Keep Your Dream Alive"

We've said that creed many times now, some of us for years. How many of you think you could say that creed by heart if we didn't have the slides? Yes, the choir of course, because they have to be here every Sunday. But you don't have to be, thank you for being here. You choose to be.

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Yes, I feel the same way. When we say something that we've said a thousand times, it's easy to forget what we're actually saying. This can happen with the Lord's Prayer, it can happen with Psalm 23. It can happen with any of our creeds and confessions, and it can happen with this. But I want to remind you that it's actually true. That you are not what you do, you're not what you have, you're not what others are saying about you or have said about you, good or bad. You're exactly what God says about you and that is that you're His beloved son or His beloved daughter.

Attaining that is at the heart of Christian discipleship. If we try to be like Jesus without holding tightly to that one thing, our discipleship will become religiosity; soul killing legalism. We must know that God has forgiven us, that God loves us, that we're not saved by our works, that we're not lost to sin because of our faith in Jesus Christ and the good work He did for us. Amen?

And the reason I begin that is because today, going into advent, we're going to talk a lot about hopes and dreams, and about the fears that many of us have that when I've made a mistake, that maybe God has taken away my dream, or my destiny, or this thing that I wanted to accomplish in my life. Have you ever felt that way? I have. I wondered at times in my life am I sick or am I not where I want to be in life because I did something wrong, or I sinned, or I made a mistake?

All of us can certainly look to things in our past we should feel guilty for or ashamed of. All of us have skeletons in our closets. Many of us, probably most of us still have baggage, addictions, stuff we're struggling with, relationship issues, even sometimes mental illness. I mean there are so many things that many of us can struggle with and we find that in the midst of that, when we're not where we want to be, we're wondering to ourselves in that advent season of life, that waiting for what we're hoping for, has God taken away my destiny? Has God removed me from where I'm supposed to be in my life? I didn't think I'd be here at this age. There's so much more by now I thought I might have accomplished, or done, or seen. I've been waiting for this one thing to happen in my life but it hasn't happened yet.

Maybe that's you. Maybe you're hoping for one of your children or grandchildren to become a Christian. Maybe you're hoping that someday you'll have life and love again in your marriage. Maybe you're a Christian, you've been a Christian for a long time, but you're sort of a Christian out of faithfulness to the gospel rather than out of true conviction or fire or passion in your heart. You wonder when you're going to hear the voice of the Lord again.

And I want you to know that all of these feelings, these hopes and dreams, many of you have them. Even different things: starting businesses or reaching a certain job, or being a part of some certain group that these things, when they're noble, when they're good, that they're worth holding onto. They're worth pursuing and they're worth waiting for.

And that's what advent teaches us. Advent reminds us of the discipline of waiting. That to get where we need to go requires patience and it requires a willingness to walk down the narrow, difficult path with the Lord. God will get you where you need to be as long as you are not hardhearted towards Him, and I think that's the key. It doesn't matter how much you've messed up, how many mistakes you have, how far you've fallen. If you are tender hearted to the voice of the Lord and His word, He will get you where you need to go.

See this is the problem, though, is God's timing, and I've said this often, this is in the Bible, God's timing is annoying. It's Phillistations 19:25. God's timing really.. it's not in the Bible. God's timing really is annoying, though, isn't it? I mean it's in the narrative. I mean you see how often people need God now and He comes much later.

God's timing isn't our timing. God is annoyingly unhurried. God is absolutely unhurried, but God is also unstoppable. He moves slowly in the direction of the thing He intends to do and nothing can stop Him. If God's put a dream in your heart, or God's called you to a destiny or something, you must understand that if you're going to walk with Christ, you must walk at a walking pace. But if you walk with Him, everywhere you go will ultimately be blessed.

Just look at God's creation, it's unhurried and unstoppable. I've read that you can put a two-inch steel band around a watermelon, and in time, that watermelon will snap that steel band. I read about a theologian who talked about trying to remove bamboo from his backyard. And he would cut it down; the first time he cut it down and it grew back twice as tall, twice as green, twice as strong, and he said my goodness. So he then cut it way down like a foot below, and then BOOM even bigger. So the third time he cut it all the way down, he dug a hole, he put poison, salt, gravel and concrete over it, and he said it wasn't too long later all of a sudden bamboo shoots started poking through the concrete.

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That's how God's creations are. That's a God designed thing. I remember when I used to work with a financial company and we would find these houses and it was amazing how they'd be just overrun by nature. I remember once there was a fairly new constructed home, it was less than ten years old, and it had been abandoned because there was a process of litigation, the tenants had left and the owners and the bank were fighting over who got to hold onto the property, and it remained vacant for several years. And during that process, this new home, when I went to go look at it to make an offer for it for the company I was working for, I was just admiring how life had just taken over the house. The whole inside of the house was full of life: rats and bats and cats and dogs and bees and snakes, they'd found a new home for themselves, as well as all manner of plants and weeds and gosh there must have been an orange tree growing in the living room, it was crazy. You'd just look and there were literally plants growing out of the floor in the middle of the room.

You go to Chernobyl today, you know Chernobyl, the town in the former Soviet Union that had the nuclear meltdown, and it's just covered with life. I mean, just nature has covered every single building.

This is the way God is, right? You can't watch in real time nature take over the things that we make, but in time, they will. This is God's nature: unhurried, unstoppable, unhurried, unstoppable, unhurried, unstoppable.

God has a calling for your life, something you're hoping for, something you're dreaming for, and if you're American like me, you want it now. Let's get efficient. Let's be industrious, people. You find out now that's not the way God always works. And God will get you there. He's going to take time. And it's in that in-between that we remember and we truly enter into that advent season.

Advent is actually not Christmas. Advent is the waiting for Christmas. Advent literally means the arrival, but the advent season is waiting for the arrival. It's like when you go to the airport and you're waiting for your kids to come on the plane, or your parents, or a good friend, but they're not there yet. And that's what the advent season is supposed to be like for the church. It's remembering what the ancestors, what it was like as our Jewish ancestors were waiting for the coming of the Messiah. And it's like when we're in here, we're waiting together. And what we're trained to do in this advent season is align our own hopes and dreams with the hopes and dreams of the Jewish people waiting for the Messiah.

What are you hoping for? Surely you're hoping for something. Surely you have a dream in your heart. Maybe you're here today because somebody dragged you here. You didn't mean to come but you lost a bet. Maybe you're here because you have a flat tire and you just needed a warm place to sit for a while. Maybe you're watching because you're just flipping the stations and the channels or whatever.

For whatever reason you're hearing this, if you don't have any hopes or dreams, there's a good chance you struggle with despair. And I want to encourage you today that if you don't have a hope or a dream, that you think about it today and you even ask the Lord, Lord, what would you have me do in my life? What hopes and dreams do you have for me?

And then I would encourage you to keep that dream alive, to work hard for that dream, and not blame anybody for not getting your dream, but simply trust in the Lord and pursue it with all your heart, and watch what you can make of your life. Watch what the Lord can make of your life. And watch what you can achieve.

Hoping for things is so good for the soul. It's easy when we get sick, when we get older, when we go through so many disappointments to stop dreaming all together; to give up on our goals, or to stop hoping for things. But I want to encourage you keep hope alive. Keep your dream alive and don't be worried about the hard work and the time that lies between you and your destiny. God will get you there.

In Genesis chapter 3, we read the advent story. This is actually the first advent story. So advent is really an Old Testament season. It's the sort of waiting that you see throughout the Old Testament for the coming of the anointed one, or the Messiah. And the first advent passage is actually at the very beginning of the Bible in Genesis.

And many of us know the story. God created His good world. It was chaos and He created it into a place of order and goodness. And He placed in that world a garden, and in that garden, He raised from the dust a man and He called him Adam. And Adam and the Lord knew each other. It was like they were friends; they walked with one another in the garden. But Adam, it wasn't enough. He needed a companion.

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Actually it's interesting because the Bible says "and God said it is good." And God said "it is good." And God said "it is good." And then when God creates a man, He says "and God said it is not good." It literally says that. "It is not good that man should be alone." Isn't that funny? So He created a woman. Am I right? I'm looking at you ladies.. thumbs up.

So out of Adam's body comes Eve and they become a perfect match for one another. And I know this sounds weird to us, but Adam and Eve lived in the garden naked. And this is the idea that they lived a life without shame. They weren't ashamed of anything, they weren't guilty about anything, they were just fully alive and fully joyful, and they didn't think in terms of nakedness or clothing. Why? Because they had nothing to hide. I also think that Adam had a six-pack, so that didn't hurt. But that's just me, I don't really know.

They have this perfect world and they have one rule and we all know what the rule was: don't eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It was optionality that God gives to Adam and Eve: the ability to leave God if they want to. If you want to leave me and you want to live life without me, you can eat from this tree and you will know evil. And they take that route and they're tempted by the serpent.

And then this is what happens afterwards. You realize that when this happens, all evil enters into the world, all sin enters into the world, and Adam and Eve hand over authority over this world to Satan. So it's the worst thing that's ever happened and this is what happens.

"Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as He was walking." Interesting as you can like hear God walking "in the garden in the cool of the day and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden." So there it is: shame. All of a sudden they feel shame and guilt for the first time, so it's one of the worst things someone can feel.

"But the Lord God called to the man 'where are you?' He answered 'I heard you in the garden and I was afraid because I was naked so I hid.' And He said 'who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?' The man said 'the woman'" am I right? Exactly. The man said the woman. "The woman you put here with me," so blame the woman and blaming God. "She gave me some fruit from the tree and I ate it." It's like she gave it to me and I didn't know what it was. She just gave it to me and I was like okay I'll eat it. Fine, I'll eat it, whatever. And God just moves on. "Then the Lord said to the woman, 'what is this you have done?' And the woman said 'the serpent.'" Am I right? "The serpent deceived me and so I ate it." It's not my fault, it's the serpent.

Well all of those things are a little true. And of course the serpent is where all evil comes from. So the Lord God said to the serpent, the serpent is Satan, who is real, who is actively trying to destroy your life and the life of the church and the life of Christ. He is the source of all shame, the source of all fear, the source of death, and rest assured God has given you authority over him.

"So the Lord God said to the serpent 'because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and all wild animals. You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity.'" Enmity can mean an adversary or an enemy, if you put an article in front of it. In Hebrew it can literally mean I will put an enemy there. So I will put an enemy, or I will put a fighter, or I will put someone there between you and the women. See this is the first messianic text in the Bible; first prophecy of the Messiah. "So I will put enmity or I'll put an enemy or I'll put an adversary between you and the woman, and between your offspring," who's the offspring of the devil? Demons, evil, sickness, death, hatred, "and hers." Who are her offspring? Well we are. The Jewish people first, and then all of those grafted into God's family through Jesus Christ into that covenant. "And he" not they "he will crush your head and you will strike his heel." That is the prophecy of the cross. The striking of the heel was Christ crucified, but the crushing of the head was the resurrection. Amen. And that is the promise. And so almost the whole Old Testament is the long, long, long fulfilling of this prophecy that God.. you will see as the story goes on, that things don't get better right away; they get a lot worse, starting with a murder between Cain and Abel, and nations warring with one another; illness, shorter life, war; all manner of evil entering into the world. And you see under all of that an undercurrent of God in an unhurried way, yet unstoppable way fighting evil everywhere He goes, and launching green shoots through the concrete of the kingdom of darkness. Unhurried, unstoppable. And you see it throughout the whole Old Testament.

From Abraham: that God picks a nobody from nowhere to be the father of many nations; an old man, by the way, seventy-five to be the father of many nations. Some of you guys are in your seventy-five and God's like you're going to be the father of many nations. And you're like what? I just started golfing, I just retired. No thank you.

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Look, maybe God gave a promise to you and you're sitting here today and you feel like after you got that promise in your heart, things have only gotten worse for you. Well that's the way things are. Don't lose hope. Very often when God calls us.. not very often, always when God calls us, He doesn't call us down the broad and easy path that leads to death. He calls us to the narrow, gated, difficult, rocky road that leads to life. So you can trust that the path that God calls us to is difficult. You can trust it's arduous. You can trust that it will take a long time. And you can trust that it is worth it and it will happen. Don't lose hope. Don't give up faith. God will get you where He needs to go. God never hurries and His timing is super annoying, so just trust Him. Amen?

Satan will continue to fight your life. The more important your life is, the more the enemy wants to attack you. The more he will try and stop you and do things to you, but God will save you, and God will protect you from those things. Don't be afraid. Almost all the stuff that the enemy uses to fight us and harm us is intellectual. That is, it's either we believe false things, or we're afraid, or we try and think that this little bad thing is going to be a really huge bad thing. Just trust in the Lord and live today and trust that He will get you where you need to go. Don't listen to the enemy. Listen to brave, wise people in your life, and most of all, listen to the word of God. It's always true.

So we see that all the way through the story that Satan is fighting to keep Jesus Christ from being born. In fact, at the very end, I believe Herod, who is utterly evil, when he heard that the king of Israel was going to be born, he killed all of the babies under two years old in and around Bethlehem to sort of prevent this from happening. And incidentally, we call this Holy Innocence day. It's the fourth day of Christmas, December 28th in which we remember these babies actually as the first Christian Martyrs. Did you know that? They're the first ones who are believed to have died for the sake of the gospel. And we remember them and we remember that there's always a great struggle between what God wants in the world and when it happens.

All of this to say what God promised came to pass. Because once God says something, it is chiseled in stone. God doesn't take words back, God doesn't un-promise things, God's faithfulness is not dependent on our faithfulness. The scripture says that even when we are faithless, He remains faithful because He can't deny himself. He can't go back on what He says. So trust the promises of God. Trust that He will get you where you need to go. Trust that you will go to heaven if you've depended on the name of Jesus as your Lord and Savior. Trust in these things. Don't be afraid.

Lastly, let me say this: if you hear anything is that you see through the stories in the Bible and other places, well that God loves dreamers. You ever been called a dreamer in a negative way? Ever heard anybody say 'oh she's such a dreamer. He's such a dreamer.' Take it as a compliment, friend. I'd rather be a dreamer than what did my grandpa say? I'd rather dream to do great things and fail than attempt to do nothing and succeed. I would, too. There's a power in dreams that comes from faith. Belief that my life could be bigger than it currently is.

Belief that God can take me somewhere that I'm currently not at. It broadens and enlarges your vision. It gives us purpose and hope. Even if you're older, maybe you're here today and you're very old, and you just say, oh man, I can't have any more dreams in my life. I can't have any more purpose. I've done enough, Bobby, leave me alone! I just want to tell you the older you are, the more you need to dream. I'm seeing that there have been many people who have gone into retirement and chased a golf ball for years and there's nothing wrong with playing a little bit of golf. Feel free to invite me any time. But when we lose a sense of purpose in our lives, we oftentimes.. I've seen how that's made some older people sick and kept other people alive. Doesn't mean that you have to keep a job, necessarily, but gosh what an incredible time in your life to teach and mentor and build something and give and serve. That's an incredible opportunity to live and just totally devote your life to something incredibly purposeful in the twilight of your time here on earth.

I actually wrote this down: if you keep your dream alive, your dream will keep you alive! I think that's true. And I think if you haven't had a dream or a goal in a long time, well it's time you ought to get one. Can I get an amen from the older folks in the house? Amen, all right.

Last thing is the greatest danger in pursuing our dreams is naivety. And this is called the Stockdale paradox. This is from a great book called Good to Great. In this book he talks about this admiral, Admiral James Stockdale was in a Vietnamese prison camp for eight years. He was tortured over twenty times. Starved, thirsty, wet, constantly in uncomfortable situation, many of his men died, and he shares this story about how the guys who died first were the optimists. He says that there were these men who would say 'don't worry guys we're going to get out by Christmas.' Christmas would come and go and they would say 'well now we're going to get out by Easter.'

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Easter would come and go and they would say 'we'll we're going to get out by the Fourth of July' and all of a sudden Christmas has come again. And he said those men, they died of a broken heart because they weren't rooted in the brutal facts of the reality of where they currently were. And he said the negative guys died too. He's like what you really needed was a little bit of both. The paradox is this: he said I never doubted for a second that I would get out, but I also dealt with the fact that I had no idea when that was going to be, and that I had to just take one day at a time, something like that. And this was his quote.

So the Stockdale paradox goes like this: "you must retain faith that you will prevail in the end regardless of the difficulties." We all believe that right? "And at the same time, you must confront the most brutal facts of your current reality, whatever they may be."

Sometimes we think that being hopeful and being a dreamer means that we have to be in denial and forget about the fact that we are where we are. But that same thing can keep you from taking action in what currently needs to be addressed.

Yvon Chouinard, the eighty-year-old founder of.. an adventurer, founder of Patagonia, gave us this great quote. He said, "There's no difference between a pessimist who says 'oh it's hopeless so don't bother doing anything' and an optimist who says 'don't bother doing anything it's going to turn out fine anyway.' Either way nothing happens." And I like that idea that you are able to say this is difficult. Maybe you have cancer. You're able to say I have cancer but I will beat it. I have a bad marriage but God can save it. I'm out of shape but I can get healthy. I have an addiction but I also have help.

There are things we can do when we're stuck in these situations where we don't have to choose between utter despair and giving up, or between naïve optimism, but rather we can have hope, and faith, and acknowledge where we truly are, and yet trust that God will get us where we need to go.

Friends, God loves dreamers. Don't forget during this advent season, my hope is that there will be a movement from the Holy Spirit within our church to reignite many of the hopes, dreams, and to give all of us the resilience we need to endure the sometimes months and even years that we need of struggle to get to victory we need to achieve. Amen?

Let's pray: Father, we love you and we thank you that you love us. And I just believe, God, that so many people that are struggling with shame and guilt, we repent of our sin. We ask that you forgive us and wash us clean, Father of all the things we've done. Trust God, that even if we fall again, Lord you will not rob us or take away our destinies, but you will walk with us and carry us to where we need to go. Lord, we love you and we thank you and we trust you. It's in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

BENEDICTION – Bobby Schuller

Thank you so much for being here today. Way to go! You got out of bed and you came to church. I just believe that being rooted in God's house makes life better. Now as you leave, go and enjoy the day. Rest, take a nap, eat good food, spend time with the people you love, turn your phones off. Don't check your email. Don't do work if you can avoid it. And make it a day to rest and be with the Lord and the people you love.

And now the Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make His face to shine upon 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.