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Hour of Power, 24.12.2019

### WORDS OF WELCOME – Bobby Schuller (BS) and Hannah Schuller (HS)

HS: Merry Christmas! On one of the darkest nights of the year, the brightest hope was born. Immanuel, God is with us.

BS: We're so honored that you're here with us tonight, friends, and grateful that you've come, maybe brought your family, maybe brought your friends, but more than anything, we're all gathered here to worship the name of Jesus, and to celebrate the fact that on the year zero, I think there was one poet that said He broke history in half like a twig in His birth. I think it's great.

So we're just so grateful and ready to celebrate the name of Jesus. Let's pray together: Father, thank you for calling us to this place. We love you, God, and we thank you that you love us in return, and we thank you that you sent Jesus into our world to save us, and it's in His name we pray, amen.

HS: Amen.

### SCRIPTURE – Matthew 1:1-2, 7-12 – Chad Blake

The words of our Lord found in Matthew chapter 2:

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw His star when it rose and have come to worship Him.

Then Herod called the magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find Him, report to me so that I too may go and worship Him.

After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with His mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshipped Him. Then they opened their treasures and presented Him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

### SCRIPTURE – Luke 2:8-20 – Chad Blake

The words of our Lord found in Luke chapter 2:

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

But the angel said to them, do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David, a Savior has been born to you. He is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you – you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth, peace to those on whom His favor rests.

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about. So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen Him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.

But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had seen, which were just as they had been told.

## Christmas Hope

### MESSAGE – Bobby Schuller " Christmas Hope"

I want to tell you guys a little story about the best Christmas Eve service I ever had. It was in 1999, and it was going into the year 2000. A lot of us were not sure if we were going to make it. You remember Y2K? It was an interesting time. And I was invited by my grandfather, who was a world renowned preacher, I mean had maybe one of the biggest religious audiences in the world at the time. And it was such an honor and a joy as a kid, he's just grandpa, but to be able to go with him to Israel as an 18-year-old, just out of high school.

And I vividly remember, there were about 500 people who had made the tour with him, and they were from all over the world, literally all over the world. And they're all there in Israel gathered in Bethlehem on Christmas Eve, at night, and Michael Crawford was there. Do you remember Michael Crawford, the original Phantom of the Opera? Michael Crawford in '99, like at the height of his deal, was there with us singing these Christmas.. it was amazing.

And one of the special things I remember was it was raining, and of course in Israel rain counts as like.. it's a blessing, like in California, like every time it rains everybody's excited here? It's a blessing. It's like it's a blessing from God.

So it begins to rain before the event, and all these umbrellas are out. And just as the event begins, the rain stops. It truly felt like a miracle. And it was candle lit, and wonderful, just like this. And that was a remarkable. The downside I didn't think of was the next day – waking up on Christmas morning in Jerusalem, and it was the most boring thing ever. We're like in old town Jerusalem, and you forget everybody there is either Jewish or Muslim, and it's like they just forget that it's Christmas; they don't care. It's like a normal Tuesday. There's traffic, everybody's going to the bank, they're running errands, it's like ho hum, whatever.

And my Uncle Tim and I were wandering the city looking for some Christmas cheer. We're hoping somebody in this darn city would celebrate Christmas, for goodness sake. Isn't this where it all happened?

So we're wandering around looking for a place to celebrate. And we wander into the Armenian district. Now I didn't know at the time that Armenian's were Christians. The only Armenian I'd ever heard of was the Kardashians. So Armenian's are Christians, they celebrate Christmas, but we didn't know that, so we're wandering into this district, and we're like okay, we're not going to be able to celebrate Christmas on Christmas Day, we might as well go into this pizza place. And there's this pizza place called Abu-Shinob. Had a picture of a guy with a fez on, and this big Mario mustache, and he's like holding a pizza. And we think well if we can't celebrate Christmas, at least we can gorge ourselves on pizza.

So we go inside and it was so awesome. It was like the second we opened the door, it was like, (MAKES CHRISTMAS SONG) I mean there was like an Armenian Santa Claus who's like handing out things to people, there's like a train going around the top, there's Christmas trees, and people are singing, and literally like a Disney movie, the second we open up the doors, it's like five guys all with a beer in their hands like click their beers together, and it splashes everywhere like a Disney movie. And it was the most Christmassy feeling thing ever! And it was awesome. And I vividly remember that.

And one of the things I noticed about that pizza place in the Armenian district of Jerusalem was how different everybody was there; Israel, a very international place, you look and you could see that there were people from east Asia, and people from middle eastern Christians, Latin America, parts of Europe and obviously parts of the U.S. and Canada, and they were all gathered there for one reason, and His name is Jesus Christ.

And that's what Jesus does. He draws us in, despite our political views and our language barriers and our cultural issues, there's something so unifying about Jesus Christ.

And the thing that He does, He does it with joy! People come together clinging beers together in His name. Well not in the Baptist churches, but Presbyterian churches they do sometimes; that's beside the point.

My point is merely that that Jesus brings people together with joy. And that's a very good.. I'm just going to leave it there. I'm going to leave it. It's a very good thing. And the way that the Lord does that, the way that the Holy Spirit does this in the world today and where He used to do it is by softening the hearts of men; softening the hearts of women.

It's the exact opposite of that that separates us from one another, isn't it. It's a hardened heart; a heart that is crystallized that says no, no, no. And today I want to ask you to not miss out on the joy that is to know Christ by hardening your heart because you've been hurt by religious people.

## Christmas Hope

Because you've been hurt by some church. Because you've been hurt by some bizarre dogma. I want you to know that Jesus is not like that, and I want to ask you to soften your heart to the things of God.

It was interesting, in the story that Pastor Chad was reading earlier, the Luke passage, Luke chapter 2, we hear the very famous story of the Virgin Mary pregnant, with Joseph, wandering Bethlehem, trying to find a place to have a baby. Now this is a big deal. It's also her first baby. Those of you who have had lots of children, you always know the first one is the most nervous. That's the one you really.. everything. It's her first kid. And they're wandering around Bethlehem, and because of the census, Bethlehem is just full of people, and there's no vacancy, right? No room is available. And they're wandering. They're going from door to door trying to find someplace for Mary to be and to have this kid. And as they're looking she begins to go into labor. Can you imagine that? I remember when Hannah went into labor with Haven, I lost my mind. When I came home, the two doors to our house were wide open, and the two front doors to my car were open, and like four doors total had just been left open.

So think about how they're feeling. Mary is going into labor, and they can't find a couch, a chair, something, some clean place to deliver this baby. Until they eventually wander into a barn where animals are, and there's a lot of, you know, it's dirty, there's manure, there's all this stuff and you have to deliver a kid there. And then they place the Son of God, this baby in a manger, which is just a fancy word for a feeding trough. It's not a clean place to put a newborn baby. So it was a very uncomfortable experience for the holy family, right?

And so very often we feel bad for Mary and Joseph, in particular, for this very hard experience they went through, and we should, but when I read the story, I actually feel bad for the inn keepers. I mean think about one after another, each inn keeper turned their back on a pregnant woman in labor. I mean you can't even think there was one guy, there wasn't just one guy who was like take my bed, I'll sleep on the floor for a night. Like no one did that, which is amazing because the Jewish people are and were so hospitable. To turn away a mother is crazy.

And the reason I feel bad for them is think about this: think about that inn keeper on judgment day. And he gets to the judgment seat and there's Jesus Christ sitting on the throne of God and He says to the man, oh I remember you. I suppose you want to get in now. No vacancy.

So you got that, right? And you got the fact that you're going to have to face Jesus and apologize that you didn't allow His mother when she was in labor to use one of your rooms, but even more than that, maybe not more than that, but another thing we got to think about is just think about how they missed out. I mean this is maybe the most important event in history. This is what makes the year zero, zero. It's the year Jesus was born, right? And to have been the inn that said yes, there was only one inn, there was only one man and he gave up his bed and Jesus was born there, and he's Saint Bill, or something. To have missed out on truly what was one of the most remarkable events in human history, for whatever reason. So they really missed out.

And this is my question. This is my question: why would they do that? Why would all of these people turn their back on a woman in labor and miss out on Mary and Joseph and Jesus knocking on the door. Why would they do that? Do you think it was because they were malicious, or they were evil, or sinister in some manner? I don't think so. I think they were busy. They had a full room, they were running around, they had things to do, and they certainly weren't going to deal with this mess.

I think that's the problem. And when I think about when Jesus Christ comes knocking on my heart, or when He comes knocking on our hearts, and when we turn the Lord away with a hardened heart, I don't think it's because we're evil or malicious or sinister in some way, I think it's because we're busy. We're too busy. We got all this stuff going on, we're stressed out, we're worried, we're moving in a million miles. I just don't have time for that. And it's those types of decisions that ruin our lives. It's those types of decisions that cause us not to be Saint Bill, but Bill the guy that's like sorry about your mom.

In truth, I wonder, though, that very often why we become hard, and I think the reason our hearts get hard is because of our busyness. And I want to tell you that there's such a better life available than what the world offers. The world is always offering more of the same stuff, and many of us we continue to pursue those things, even though it doesn't satiate us or make us full of joy or help our life, or make us truly joyful. Jesus offers a different way. And many of you are not Christians, many of you don't go to church, and I'm not even asking you to become a Christian, although that would be awesome, okay seriously that would be great.

## Christmas Hope

But if that's not your time for that, I just want to ask you to soften your heart to the things of God. To just be open to the fact that maybe God wants to do something great in your life.

I think that the reason hearts become hardened is because people have been walked on. There's a story that Jesus says that there was the sower and the seed, and a seed that falls among thorns and falls among rocks and falls among good soil, but we very often forget the first one, that it falls on the road, or on the path, and it's just devoured by the birds. And a hardened path, it becomes a path because it's been walked on. When good soil has been walked on so many times it becomes hard, and no seed can go in it. Have you been walked on? Have you been trampled on by religious people? Have you been packed down into hardness because of a relative or a friend that said certain things or thought certain things that just seem ugly or hateful or bitter or judgmental? Perhaps those things weren't from God. What if they were from the devil? The Bible says that the Holy Spirit's the comforter. If you didn't feel comforted by those things, perhaps it wasn't from the Lord. I don't know. All I want to say is that if you've been trampled on, if your heart has been hardened maybe by religious people, or maybe your hearts been hardened by tragedy. You've gone through too many difficult things in your life, and you just can't soften your heart to the Lord. Or maybe it's your own sin. Maybe you really have made some terrible mistakes and you've treated people truly terribly and you're just like I'm so far down this road, I can't ever go back. Maybe that's you today.

For any of these reasons, I want you to know that if you're alive, God still has a plan for your life, and if you're alive, God still wants you. And it's never too late to turn your heart to God and to live the life you were truly called to live. To become a true student of Jesus Christ, and to live the way He asked us to live. Soften your heart to the things of God. Soften your heart so that God can do something in your life.

Many of us who are here, we just can't do it because we can't bring ourselves to believe in something so silly. And very often, Jesus also teaches that anyone who has the faith of a mustard seed can move a mountain. You know what I think about that? If 99% of you just can't believe in God or Jesus, but maybe there's just a small part of you, a one percent, a mustard seed size part of you that says maybe I can believe in God, I want to challenge you to just give that little bit of your heart to the Lord and see what He can do with that. Give it in faith. Just say look I'm hung up on all these things, but Lord, I'll just give you this little bit. Show me what you can do with a little bit of faith, and watch what the Lord could do in your life.

If you're a dad, your children need you to follow the Lord. If you're a mom, your children need you to follow the Lord. If you're married, your spouse needs you to follow the Lord. And to follow the Lord means to do what He said to do. It means not only to believe in Him, but to believe what He taught. And so today, I encourage you to become that kind of a disciple. To come to Christ and at the very least, explore the things that He taught.

So this Christmas, I encourage you friend, first of all you're doing a lot better than you think. But soften your heart to the things of God and do what you can to be more like Christ in your character. Do good to your neighbor even when they're rude to you. Be kind to the person at your workplace when everybody else is unkind to them. Love your enemies. Speak the truth. Believe the truth in love. Let go of your bitterness. Forgive one another. Don't worry so much. Have some faith. See the best in others. Do the things Jesus taught you to do, and I promise you you'll draw closer to the people you love, and you'll draw closer to your destiny and the things God's called you to do. For many of you, it's the last thing that stands between you and fulfilling the purpose that God's called you to. Amen.

### BENEDICTION – Bobby Schuller

Awesome! Truly was awesome. Thank you musicians. We're so grateful for you.

And thank you for coming tonight to celebrate Christmas with us. Make it a family tradition. Come back next year, and of course, come back next Sunday. We have church here every single Sunday morning: 8:30, 9:45 and 11:00. We hope you'll come. We have a great community. If you've got kids or grandkids, bring them. We're a church that loves children. We'll teach them the things of God.

Well, 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 a very Merry Christmas.