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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. Good morning.

HS: And welcome visitors and church family. It is a joy to have you here today. You know there's a saying the kids, and I like to add and adults, who need love the most, beg for it in the most unloving ways. And God has called us to be His presence to them. Thank you so much for being here today. You are so loved.

BS: Such a good word. It's good to remember when we feel angry or frustrated at someone, that very often that's a sign of them needing compassion, needing forgiveness, needing mercy.

So Lord, we thank you and we come into this house full of your spirit, full of your life, and full of your people, and we ask, Lord, only one thing that the name of Jesus Christ would be lifted up. We come here to worship you, Lord, to learn, to grow, but especially just to worship you and to give you glory. Father, we love you and it's in Jesus' name we pray, amen.

HS: Amen. Turn around and shake the hand of the person next to you and say God loves you and so do I.

SCRIPTURE – 2 Kings 2:9-12 – Hannah Schuller

You may be seated. In preparation for the message, 2nd Kings 2:9-12:

When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, tell me what I can do for you before I am taken from you. Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit, Elisha replied. You have asked a difficult thing, Elijah said. Yet if you see me when I am taken from you, it will be yours. Otherwise, it will not.

As they were walking along and talking together, suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them. And Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind. Elisha saw this and cried out: my father! My Father! The chariots and the horsemen of Israel. And Elisha saw him no more. Then he took hold of his garment and tore it in two.

Church, just as Elijah was a spiritual father to Elisha, and passed a double blessing onto him, so has God called us to be mentors and to double bless the next generation. Amen.

DECLARATION – Bobby Schuller

Hold your hands out like this as a way of receiving. 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 need to worry, I don't have to hurry, I can trust my friend Jesus and share His love with the world.

MESSAGE – Bobby Schuller "Being a Spiritual Parent"

Well today we're continuing a series on blessing the next generation. So believe it or not, we are sort of going back to school. Woodbridge, which is the high school across the street, is going back to school in the next couple weeks. Throughout the Midwest, we have a bunch of people starting school this week.

One of the things we want to do during this time is take three weeks and just talk about what it means to bless the next generation. So today we're going to talk about the power of what this has on society, and I want to begin with just an observation. I'm probably not qualified to talk about this in particular, because I wasn't alive, but I believe that the 1960's ushered in a lot of really good things, but also some bad things. The really good things are obvious: Civil Rights movement. I mean the list goes on and on of many good things that happened in the 60's. The Beatles, for example, is another wonderful thing.

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But there were some bad things, and I think, this is just conjecture, but I think something that happened in the 60's with the post World War II affluence and growth of the United States economy, and this growing middle class, a lot of traditions and values began changing at a rapid pace. And I think something happened between what would be my grandparent's generation, and my parent's generation where something that was more common, that is the honoring of one's parents, and the blessing of one's children disappeared in certain spaces and areas.

So I think that something that happened was a lot of parents who came back, felt like their children were so different than they were. And it became hard for the older generation to bless the younger generation with their long hair and their hippy dippy music and whatever. There was something culturally that was happening that for some in that older generation made it hard to bless.

Conversely, the younger generation found it harder to honor the older generation as certain values were changing, and certain things were happening. All that to simply say that I think a rift took place between those two generations that have caused many of the problems that we're facing today as a society. It's just a theory, but for example, when we used to work with the homeless and with the inner city, we saw a lack of parental support being at the root of many of these problems.

For example, if you were to work with gangs, you would find that many of the boys who are in gangs grew up in a home without a dad. That the gang gave them something that they were missing by not having a father in the house, either a real father or a spiritual father or a mentor. So you'll find that when they got to the gang, the gang members, the older ones, the leaders, even though they're evil, they created a position to honor. They created a way to engender honor and respect. And in doing so, the older gang members were able to bless that younger generation. And so as almost twisted version of the blessing going down and the honor going up was present and is present in gangs, and fills a felt need by many boys and girls who get drawn into gangs, which incidentally is I think one reason why the Big Brother, Big Sister organizations are so useful and helpful to inner city kids and at risk teens.

Homelessness is another place where you see this a lot. A lot of homeless people are the result of being away from their parents or not having the blessing of their parents, or not knowing their parents. And so all of this to say that to quote this thing, we used it last week; it is a Greek proverb that says, "a society grows great when its elders plant trees under whose shade they know they will never sit." I think this is true of every great civilization that has ever existed, every great organization, every great family, it is a group of people who are doing things today that they know will not benefit them personally tomorrow. That they are applying themselves a great amount of effort, time, money, sacrifice, in order to make sure that the person that comes after them, after they're gone, will be in a better position. This is true of great companies, where a CEO lays a ground work for a new CEO and new leaders that are coming in. This is true of churches where pastors and leaders and elders pave the way for young women and men to come up and lead in those communities. And this is also true in families.

And so we have to, have to, have to understand that when our society loses this, I don't know what to call it, but it's just like a circle of honor and blessing where the older generation does whatever it can to bless the next generation, and the young generation does whatever it can to honor the older generation, we set up our countries, our family, our churches, our organizations to be joyful, godly, good, happy places. We set it up for blessing. And this is something that not just older people need, this is something young people need. Young people need someone to honor, someone to idealize, someone to internalize after that person is gone.

Now for the Jewish people, the Torah is the holiest part of the Bible. For Christians, the whole Bible is equally holy, but for Jews the Torah is considered more holy than the rest of the Tanakh, the Jewish Bible. And of the Torah, the most important part is probably the Ten Commandments, right? So all of us have a general understanding of the Ten Commandments.

And it's interesting when you read the Ten Commandments, I was listening to a radio show where people were talking, there was a Jewish guy who was leading it, and he was asking the question: of the Ten Commandments, what would you add or take away? The most interesting thing about that discussion is there really were no good answers. The more they discussed it over like an hour, the more you realized how great the Ten Commandments are.

But one of the interesting things about the Ten Commandments is eight of the ten are "thou shalt not's," right? Do not do this, do not do that. Only two are about doing something. And both of those doing something's are about honor. So the first is "remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy." So it's a way of honoring God, right?

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Honoring God with your day, remembering God, remembering your covenant. But the second is what? “Honor your father and your mother.” Honor your father and your mother, and as Paul points out, this is the first commandment in the Bible that is linked to a promise.

Do you remember what the second part of that commandment is? Honor your father and mother so that do we have the scripture? I think we have it. So that you may live long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you. This promise that if the young.. see this is the problem. I think a lot of people who are not Jewish, when they read this commandment, they think it's for children and teens. It is, but it's for adults, too. It's for everyone. Even if your parents are gone, that in death you honor them. That there is this way of, not being unrealistic, not being in denial, but at least honoring the older generation, and the younger generation receiving the blessing that comes from that honor that creates strength, it galvanizes a community, it blesses God's people, it is a good thing to have, and it is a good thing to do. And I actually think that in America we're learning to reclaim some of that. I think it's a really good thing.

And wherever you are, whatever country you're in, this is so important that, not just as a nation, but just for your own soul. See I think also the other thing we think, this commandment is for old people, right? They earned it, they deserved it. I really don't think it's about nurturing the older generation, I think it's about the need for a younger generation to have someone honorable to look to; to feel that what I'm doing is on the shoulders of giants, is built on something bigger, something stronger.

I think it's for the younger generation that really God does this because I believe young people need spiritual parents, whether they're real parents or elders in the community, young people need spiritual parents to honor. And I think that when a group of people gets this thing where the older generation is just blessing the younger generation, just blessing them, blessing them, blessing them, and the younger generation is honoring, honoring, honoring and lifting up, that something amazing happens.

One other thing before I move on from the Ten Commandments, notice how it doesn't say love your father and mother. I love my father and mother, you probably do, too. But in the Bible, it's weird because it tells us to love all sorts of people, right? The Bible multiple times tells us to love God, to love our neighbor, tells us to love the immigrant, tells us to love our enemies, but here it doesn't say love your mother and father, it says to honor them. I think, especially when you're a teenager, but lots of other times, there are plenty of times when it's hard to love in the effectual way, your parents. For some people, that can be really tough. And when that happens, God says maybe you don't feel like you can love them, but at least honor them.

And maybe you'll say what's the difference. Here's a great example. The press.. okay I have to say this the right way.. there are certain presidents that the press loves, and there are other presidents that the press doesn't love. But no matter what, for generations, every president that comes into the press room, the press always does the same thing. What do they do? They stand to honor someone whom they might not necessarily love.

One way to answer the question – what does it mean to honor my elders, I always love inverting, so probably a better question to ask is: what would it mean to dishonor my elders?

And so today I just want to talk about that, about what it means for us to honor our spiritual mothers and our spiritual fathers, and even if they're gone, how to internalize that message, that memory and how if you're older here, one of the best things you can do for a younger generation, even if you don't understand them, is to find the best way possible, any way to bless them. To just place your hands on them and say my daughter, my son, I bless you, I love you. When this happens, good things come out of it, amen?

There's this relationship between a spiritual mother and daughter, a spiritual father and son and vice versa, it says all throughout the Bible there's so many great stories, but to me my favorite is the famous story between Elijah and Elisha. And this gets difficult to tell the story because the names are so similar. The older is “juh,” everybody say “juh”. Just like he's juh, he's old. I don't know. I'm trying to find a way to remember. And the “sha” is the young, okay? “Sha.” And even if I mix it up, just remember it's the other way around. The older is “juh” and the younger is “sha.”

So let's start with the book of Kings. Kings is actually.. we have first and second Kings. It's actually just one book called Kings. But the Hebrew rabbi split it into two books because the scrolls got too big. It's a Jewish thing to do, isn't it very practical? So first and second Kings, it's just the book of Kings. It is the story about how Israel gets divided into the Northern Kingdom and the Southern Kingdom because of evil and selfishness. And it's a story of 40 kings, most of whom get worse and worse and worse.

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Assassination, idolatry, child sacrifice, the worship of Beelzebub, the only place that name is mentioned in the Old Testament. It's the name for Satan or one of the seven princely demons. I mean there's all of this evil happening by these kings, and then there are prophets who are speaking we would say truth to power. They are speaking against the evil of these powerful men. And two that sort of stand out the most are Elijah and his disciple Elisha, the young, right? That's the way we remember.

First Elijah: Elijah, for the Jewish people, is seen as the rabbi or the teacher or the prophet with passion. When they think of Elijah, they think of his zeal. It gets him into trouble a lot of times. And he always has a zeal against mainly Ahab, but there's lots of people that he goes against.

There's one story where he goes up to Mount Carmel and all of his friends have been killed. All the good men, and all of his prophets, he has this company of prophets and this evil king Ahab and his wife Jezebel, who have created this altar to Baal, have killed all of his friends. So finally like a lone ranger, he goes up to Ahab and he says gather all your friends, bring them up on Mount Carmel. Gather all 850 prophets of Baal and then bring the whole nation of Israel, and they will see who is god. Is it Yahweh or Baal?

And so this contest ensues where the prophets of Baal, they set up an altar with.. I keep picturing steaks because its cattle. I forget which animal it is: cow or something. And they put this meat on the altar and they set it up, and then the 850 prophets of Baal begin crying out to see if Baal will light this thing on fire, and nothing happens. And they begin to cut themselves and scream aloud, and hours go by and Elijah just begins mocking them. The Bible actually says at one point he goes where's your god? Perhaps he's taking a (PAUSES) on the toilet. Isn't that great? The Bible says it, not me, okay? So don't let me.. I'm just saying, that's what he.. okay.

And nothing happens, and this causes them to freak out even more. And then finally Elijah goes all right, take the altar, pour buckets and buckets of water on it so it's literally just in a soup of water, and he calls upon God and fire comes from the sky and consumes the altar, and the whole nation of Israel freaks out. And everybody who bows down before the altar and the real presence of Yahweh God, and then they go and massacre the 850 prophets of Baal. And before you feel bad for those prophets, those prophets were doing child sacrifice, among other horrible things. They kind of earned it.

So this is Elijah the prophet of passion. And then he comes back up to the mountain and down the mountain, runs up the mountain, he praises God and then runs twenty miles to outrun Ahab on his chariot. He's just this guy full of fire. And then when he finds out that Jezebel is going to kill him, he runs to Mount Sinai, which he's the only other person to do that other than Moses. He goes to Mount Sinai and just begins to dwell in self pity. It's like all my friends are dead, none of these kings will listen to me, God moves with power, and yet they build up these idols and they worship demons and they kill children and they do evil and they assassinate, and he's just like I'm done.

And so he curls up into a little ball in a cave on Mount Sinai, and after awhile this angel comes up to him and he kicks him. He says get up, the Lord is about to come. So Elijah covers his head and he puts it in cloth and he goes outside because if he sees the Lord, it says he'll die. So with his head and face covered, he hears these sounds. He's trying to listen to the voice of the Lord. And it says first there's this great wind and it splits the mountain and rocks fall, and he says but God's not in the wind. And then there's this earthquake, it says God's not in the earthquake. And lightning and fire and He's not in any of those things. And then it says that the Lord speaks to him in a whisper, and He says Elijah, what are you doing here? And He tells him go do down from the mountain, find Elisha – everybody say "sha" and anoint him to be your successor.

Cut away to Elisha, he's out in the field, he's got 12 oxen. This is probably his personal wealth. Twelve oxen then would have been a lot, it would have been like your life savings. And he's tilling the ground with these oxen. He's working hard, he's driving them himself, and in the distance he sees the famous head of all the prophets. I mean he's the greatest most godly man in all of Israel. Famous. Everybody knows who Elijah is. And Elisha in the distance begins to walk towards him like this.

Now Elijah has this thing hanging over his shoulders called a mantle. It's the symbol of his office and of his power and of his authority, and it sort of is like a giant cape that wraps around him and it sort of trails behind him. I like to think like Joseph, maybe it was colorful or made of a fine material, but whatever, it was noticeable. And it hung from his shoulders, and as he walked and the wind blew, you could sort of see it move and cascade in the wind.

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And without saying a single word, Elisha stops and they look at each other, and this old man Elijah walks up to him, doesn't say anything to him. Doesn't say anything. Takes this thing off of his shoulders and puts it over Elisha, and looks at him in the eyes, and they both know. And no word is exchanged. And so Elijah takes it back off his back, and puts it on his shoulders and begins to walk away, and Elisha says wait, wait! Let me say goodbye to my family. I will follow you. Let me say goodbye to my family.

So Elijah stands there and he says go, then sort of waits. And what Elisha does is so wonderful. He goes back to that wealth, to all of that stuff, all of that.. see anything he can come back to. His plan B, his 12 oxen. It's interesting number: 12. Its 12 tribes of Israel. It's a holy number in the Bible. And he kills all of them, and he uses the wood to make this giant pyre and then he just has a giant barbeque. He cooks all this meat and gives all the meat to his neighbors as this wonderful gift. And so they all have this gigantic feast. They say goodbye to Elisha, and by doing that, Elisha says I have nothing to come back to. I am devoting myself to the discipleship of Elijah and I will not come back. And after that point, Elijah becomes a spiritual father to Elisha, a mentor, a guide, and the two are absolutely attached at the hip. And they do amazing things together. Years go by, miracles, power, conflict, amazing, amazing stuff.

And finally the day comes it says that Elisha knew that Elijah would be taken up to heaven in a whirlwind. And it goes like this. Both of them kind of knowing, Elijah says to Elisha, stay here, the Lord has sent me to speak to the prophets at Bethel. And Elisha says as surely as the Lord lives, and as you live, I will never leave you. And so they go together and Elijah is giving some instruction because he knows he's leaving. He's like getting his things together, getting things done. So he's preparing all the prophets at Bethel, talking to them. And then again, a second time he goes to Elisha and he says Elisha, stay here. The Lord has sent me this time to Jericho. And by the way, all those prophets, they say to Elisha, don't you know that the Lord is taking your master today? And he says I know! Leave me alone.

So they go to the second town Jericho and as Elijah's about to go, he says stay here the Lord has sent me to Jericho, and again Elisha says to him, as surely as the Lord lives, and as you live, I will never leave you. They go to together. And then finally, a third time, and that's important that it happens three times. Elijah looks at Elisha and he says stay here, the Lord has sent me to the Jordan River. Everybody knows the Jordan River's a big, big deal.

The Jordan River is a symbol of death, it's a symbol of life, it's a symbol of crossing from one thing to another. He knows the Jordan is where this thing is going to happen.

And Elisha looks at him and he says a third time, as surely as the Lord lives and as surely as you live, I will never leave you. So they go together and they travel to Jericho, and they get to the Jordan River and Elijah who has that mantle on his back, takes it off, rolls it up into a bundle, and strikes the water. And just like in the Torah, the river parts and it creates a dry path for them to go across. They now walk across to the other side of the Jordan and Elijah puts his mantle back on and they begin to talk to one another, and they know that this is the moment.

And now as they're talking, the wind begins to blow. Something is happening. This is not a normal wind. Something is beginning to churn. The leaves are starting to rustle. There's a sort of a noise beginning, and Elijah says I'm leaving you, but before I go, what can I give you? And Elisha looks at his master and he says Elijah, give me a double portion of your Ruach. This word "Ruach" is often translated as spirit, but it's so much more than that. The Ruach is not just spirit, its wind, its life, its breath. This is the spirit that was moving over the deep and darkness of the earth in the creation story. This is when you die and you breathe your last, the Ruach leaves you. When you were born and the doctor pulled you out and slapped your butt and you went (BREATHES IN/CRRIES) that was a Ruach. You were sucking in God's wind and God's life. It's God's passion, it's God's anointing, it's God's power! And he says to Elisha give me a double portion of your Ruach, of your spirit. And Elijah says this is a difficult thing that you're asking of me.

I used to always wonder why is he reluctant to give a double portion to his student? I used to think well maybe its ego, maybe he wants to be the most famous, and that's not it. When you read the story, you find out that its Elijah's power, zeal, passion that causes him to have such a big impact, but it's also the thing that isolates him. It's probably the greatest source of his suffering. It's the thing that caused all of his friends to die. It's the thing that caused him to run to Mount Sinai and hide. Loneliness. Isolation. Suffering. He's looking at Elisha and he's like you want a double portion of that? And of course Elisha says I want a double portion of your Ruach.

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Elijah says this is a difficult thing you ask. And so instead of saying yes or no, he gives it to the Lord. He says if you see me when I depart, then you will receive this thing.

And then there's wind blowing and churning as they're talking, and their hair is rustling, and their clothing is kind of bustling in the wind. And then all of a sudden out of the sky this fiery chariot, right? Comes out of nowhere, horses on fire, chariots on fire, this blaze of fire. And it's not the chariot that takes Elijah to heaven. Elijah is taken to heaven by a whirlwind. That's not why it's there. The fire in the Old Testament is always a symbol for God Himself being present. It's the pillar of fire in the desert, it's God in the burning bush; the fire is God Himself. And what you see is.. the Bible says the chariots of fire came to part Elijah and Elisha. In other words, their bond was so deep, so endearing, so powerful that it took God Himself to divide them and to part them. A great disciple would go anywhere his rabbi would go. To hell and back if it meant that. And it took God Himself parting.

And here comes this big wind between Elijah and Elisha. And with tears in his eyes, he sees his master taken away in a whirlwind, and he just cries out NO! And pain, anguish, and it says that he tears his clothing, which is the Jewish way of absolute remorse and mourning and sadness and grief, and is weeping on the ground. His master has been taken away from him.

And now the smoke begins to clear, the wind kind of dies down, there's a haze in the air, and here is this young man just weeping, weeping. Elijah's gone. When he leaves, his last words to Elijah are – father. Father!

So there he is, weeping on the ground, like what do I do now? What do we do now that Elijah is gone? And he looks up in the sky, he's sort of falling down like a flag in the wind, making all sorts of moves, fluttering down, the mantle of Elijah falls at the feet of Elisha. He wipes the tears from his eyes, and he takes that mantle and he throws it around his shoulders, he pulls his shoulders back, and he gets to work.

You know one of the great parts about the story is there are seven great miracles that Elijah does in Kings, and Elisha does 14. So upon Elisha comes a double portion of power, of spirit, of life. And what we learn from this story as leaders is that it is more important to build people than organizations. It is more important that we build someone instead of something. There are too many leaders that want to build a big, amazing great something, but God is calling us to build big, amazing, great someone's. And what happens when we invest, lead, bond with, bless the next generation, when we're gone all of the best versions of us become internalized in that person.

Well after we're gone, we become a source of strength, life and encouragement, even in death. That's why honoring your father and mother is so important, and that's why blessing your children is so important.

If you don't have children, it's not really about that. It's about blessing the next generation. It's about being a guide. It's about believing in someone who needs a spiritual mother or a spiritual father like you. Let's become the kind of people who do that in our life. An Elijah to an Elisha that help pave the path forward for young women and men to do great things for God.

Lord, we love you and we thank you. Thank you that this room is full of Elijah's, and on television there's so many Elijah's that are doing seven miracles, but Lord you want to do 14 in the next generation. Help us to learn what it means to pass on our mantle as a double portion of our spirit to the next generation. Lord, we love you, it's in Jesus' name we pray, amen.