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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, welcome church family. We love being with you. Thank you for being here today.

You know often when we're going through tough times, we pray for deliverance, and that's good. But sometimes God wants to give us a gift within the struggle, and that's wisdom. Thank you again for being here. You are so loved.

BS: We love you guys. Let's begin with a word of prayer: Father, thank you so much that you love us. Thank you that your Holy Spirit is always doing a good work within us. We simply trust. Father, we pray this morning whatever difficulty we're going through, whatever trial we're facing, whatever it is that we're persevering, we pray God that you give us wisdom and knowledge, and we ask it in Jesus' name, 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 – James 1:1-6 – Hannah Schuller

You may be seated. In preparation for the message, James 1:1-6:

James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes scattered among the nations: greetings.

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind.

Church family, when we face challenges, may our first thought be to pray for wisdom. Amen.

WELCOME/COME VISIT – Bobby Schuller

Thank you for joining us today. It really is amazing that TV and the internet allow us to connect the whole world together in one worship service, and we really consider you a part of our church. We're so glad you're joining us today, and if you're ever in Irvine, please come down to Shepherd's Grove and worship with us. We would love to meet you. If you've got kids, bring them. We love children, so bring them, and we'd love to teach them the things of God.

DECLARATION – Bobby Schuller

Friends, would you 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.

Thanks, you can be seated.

MESSAGE – Bobby Schuller "From Obstacles to Opportunity "

Today's message, I truly believe, will change your life if you can take it to heart and apply it as much as possible in your life. So it is a life changing message if you hear what I'm about to say.

But that second part, if you're going through a tough time, if you're going through a trial right now, it can be a hard sermon to hear.

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And what we're going to talk about today is that when we go through a trial, God can use those trials to really improve us. Every loss and trial can be a doorway to a better version of you. This is ancient wisdom. It is deeply embedded in Judaism and old school Christianity. I say old school Christianity because very often as we try to encourage people in the church today, which we should do, I am a big encourager, we forget sometimes that when we're going through our difficult and tough times, God is very often attempting to do a good work in us, if we'll just allow the power of the spirit to do something great.

So if you're going through a hard time right now: sickness, financial challenges, maybe you're being sued, maybe you're facing something difficult, maybe family crisis that just feels like you can't take any more, first, let me say, you will get through this. You will. You've gotten through everything else. God will carry you through.

But second, don't miss out on the opportunity to receive the great treasure that is within the experience of suffering itself. When you're going through a difficult and tough time, this is the question we often ask: what does this mean? Especially with health things, job things, family things, we ask the question what does this mean? What will happen to this or to that? And this is not the question we should ask, nor should we catastrophize and assume that because it's bad now, everything will end.

Rather, don't ask what does this mean, don't catastrophize, but rather ask God for wisdom. God loves it when we're going through a tough time, that we ask for wisdom and knowledge before asking for deliverance. God always believes that within you, because of the Holy Spirit, when you go through difficult circumstances, God can take what Satan intended for evil, or what some person intended for evil, and turn it to good in your life. But it happens when in the struggle we're going through, we ask Lord, just give me wisdom. Lord, give me knowledge. And the more you do that in your life, you'll find that the greatest bit of wisdom you got was when you went through tough times, when you went through trials.

Many of you have had some tough times, and a lot of them you could live without, but a lot of them you think I wouldn't be the person I am today if I didn't go through that thing back there. God not only carried me through, but something happened in my soul and in my mind, in my life, that changed me for the better forever. And I think this is something that drives Satan crazy, is that if we endure with perseverance and seek to grow as people through our suffering, it's like we level up. That's a video game person talking, sorry. But you get this through your experience, through your suffering, through your challenges, you get this reformed self. You draw nearer to the person of Christ in you.

And that brings me to a very famous story, the story of Solomon. If you've grown up in church or if you've grown up in a synagogue, you've probably for sure heard this story. It's very famous, and it really is at the heart of much of Judaism's, and therefore Christianity's emphasis on seeking wisdom before seeking the other things in life. You hear it in the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus is talking about the needs and the things that we have in life, and the clothing and food and things that we seek after, and He says "but seek first His kingdom and His righteousness." Effectively wisdom and goodness. Seek first those things, "then all these other things will be added to you." So it's deeply embedded in our faith and in Judaism. So it's a great story.

So Solomon has just become king. He's a young guy. Maybe he's mid twenties, maybe he's about thirty, we don't really know. All we know is he's pretty young, and of course in those days, it's a tribal community, usually the chief is an older guy. It's a face culture so you always honor the elders. So you've got a king coming in who's kind of a young guy, and this is working against him. Worse than that, his dad was King David, THE king David. Now King David is a legend to us, but when Solomon comes on the scene, David has died, and he is enshrouded in legend. I mean there's so many stories that people love to tell about David.

For example, we still tell it: David and Goliath. There are these two armies facing each other, and there's this gigantic evil version of Shaquille O'Neal with a giant sword and armor, and he comes out and he wants to do this ancient thing where instead of two armies fighting, you have two heroes fight, and then the other one yields. And so he's challenging and mocking the Hebrew people to fight him. And of course nobody's going to fight this guy; he's just a humungous man.

And David, who is effectively a boy, says who is that uncircumcised Philistine and walks out, as Goliath is mocking him. David has no armor, no sword, he's just got this little piece of leather that's not even really a slingshot, you have to kind of whip it around. And as the guy is mocking him, David takes this rock, runs toward him, goes woo, woo, woo, woo-op, throws it and he gets him right between the eyes.

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Goliath falls back, David rushes in, grabs the sword out of his scabbard, goes WHACK right on his neck, pulls his head up, blood dripping everywhere, shows it to the Philistine, throws it at them and they all flee. That is an awesome story! That's awesome! He's a kid! This is how he starts. This is how he starts! It's not even how he finishes.

And he's got all these epic stories of battles he's won. When he's running away from Saul, he sneaks in to a cave when Saul is relieving himself on a wall, and he cuts a tassel off of his thing to show him I could have killed you and I didn't. And he pours out the sacred water in Bethlehem for his men. He's the guy that conquers Jerusalem and carries the Arc of the Covenant into the city.

All this to say, this is who Solomon's coming after: green behind the ears, kind of a kid. He's got brothers who want to be king. He's got tribal elders who don't want him to be king. He's got the Egyptians in the south. He's got the Assyrians in the north. These are some of the biggest, baddest empires that have ever existed in human history. And he's got to lead these people. He's got mega problems.

What is the first thing Solomon does as king? He gathers all of Israel: all of the elders, all of the people for a worship service. They go to the high place of Gibeon, which at that time the temple hadn't been built yet. The Arc was in Jerusalem, but there was still what was called the bronze altar in the tabernacle at Gibeon, which is the same tabernacle Moses used to go around the wilderness. And he gathers everyone there, and makes a sacrifice of a thousand animals to God. Now for us, remember, that sacrifice was wealth. He was giving up stuff he could have traded for weapons, he was giving up food, he was giving up effectively a lot of money and basically burning it on a pyre, as was the custom, to effectively say Lord, everything we have. All that we have is from you. Without you, we have nothing. With you, we have everything. Without you we will lose, with you we will have the victory. And as a young man, very wisely, begins his reign by effectively saying, God we are your people.

And nothing happens. It says he gives a speech, but it doesn't say what he said. Effectively almost seems like it was not a memorable speech. You wonder did he mess up? Did he inspire people? It doesn't say anything. Just says he gave a speech, and everybody kind of went home.

And he went into his royal tent that night, and went to bed, and somewhere in the night privately, God shows up to Solomon. I wonder what that was like. A lot of great details in these ancient stories are left out, in large part because Jewish people from the past had to memorize all these stories, so more details is more memorizing. But did he appear to him in a dream? Did he appear to him in the room? It doesn't matter. But God appears to Solomon, and says to him, what would you ask of me? What is he saying? Anything in the world, what do you want it? What do you want? One thing, what do you want? Ask for anything.

Now think about it, if God appears to you tonight, in the middle of the night, two in the morning, and your room fills up with light, and I sleep with a fan, your fan turns off. Any fan fans here? Oh?! Awesome. We should start a club. Anytime I see a fan and it's like no noise, I'm like then why would you buy it? Okay, anyway.

So God appears in your room tonight and He looks at you and He says Jim, John, Sarah, Michele, what do you need? What do you want? Say it. What do you want? I'll tell you what I would say. Lord, heal my son. Lord, bring more children to our church. Lord, give me 50 Eagles donors. I think of all of these things that if just this one thing happened, everything would be better, easier, it would change my life, my churches life, my family's life forever. I would absolutely say those things. You think Solomon had it easier than I have it? Certainly not. Solomon facing some of the biggest challenges any king has ever faced, and he's got real eminent problems that need to be solved right now. And when God offers him anything, what does he ask for? Wisdom! He sits up in his bed and he looks at the Lord and he says give me wisdom and knowledge that I can lead your people.

And God looks at him and He says because from your heart your deepest desire was not.. and this is what I love is that God names all the things that Solomon didn't ask for that he could have. He says first you didn't ask for wealth, you didn't ask for possessions and honor, you didn't ask for a long life or we might say to solve our health problems, and you didn't ask for the death of your enemies. Now I, just to stand back for a second, I think if we could chill out with God in heaven for a day and like receive all prayers via email and analyze them, my guess is you could group 90% of prayers into these four things. I need money, I need health, I need you to kill my enemies. We have this challenges that we face. Lord, deliver us from these problems.

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And God says deliberately you didn't ask for wealth, you didn't ask for possessions and honor, you didn't ask for a long life, and you didn't ask for death of your enemies. Instead, because I can see in the deepest part of your heart, that your will is totally all you want is wisdom and knowledge, I'm going to give you wisdom and knowledge like no one before you has ever had. And then He said, and I'm also going to give you wealth. And I'm also going to give you honor. And the third one He says with a caveat: and if you obey my commands, I will also give you a long life, but He does not say I will give you the death of your enemies. I wonder why that is, by the way.

Could it be that Abraham's blessing that I will bless you and you will be a blessing to the Gentiles, you will be a blessing to all the peoples of the earth, every ethnicity, every culture, every language, you will bless them, right? You will make them happy, you will help their cups to overflow. And what Jesus teaches us that, you've heard that it was said love your neighbor and hate your enemy, but I say love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. Maybe there's wisdom in that; that part of gaining wisdom is learning that anytime you destroy an enemy, it's almost always replaced by another. That maybe the wisdom is turning your enemies into your friends. Maybe that's one of the things that Solomon's about to learn. And that's the one thing that God does not promise to Solomon.

Anyway, I think it's wonderful that it seems like it really stirs God's heart that even though Solomon is going through all these challenges, he doesn't ask for deliverance, he asks for wisdom. And what if we were that way? What if when we were going through our tough times and we're just like Lord, just get me through this; Lord, help my financial problem; Lord, help my job problem. Lord, help my health problem. We just said Lord, give me wisdom. All I ask is for wisdom and knowledge that I could lead a good life and be a good person. I believe that that would stir God's heart, and I believe it is very rare for God to receive a prayer like that. Let's start praying that way. Should we start praying that way? Should we start asking God for wisdom?

So then there are two versions of the story. The first version is in 1st Kings and it tells a very famous story about Solomon that shows how wise he is at such a young age. And it goes like this. There were two prostitutes who lived together, and no one else lived in that house. And they both became pregnant at the same time, and delivered two babies at roughly the same time, just a few days apart. They're both nursing their boys and they fall asleep, and one falls asleep on the baby and smothers him to death. In the middle of the night, that woman takes her dead baby, who's only a few days old, and puts it at the breast of the other mother, and takes the living baby and puts it at her own breast. And then when they wake up in the morning, the other mother wakes up to this dead child.

And of course two babies of the same general race, it's going to be hard to tell when they're only a few days old who's whose, but mothers know, don't they. The mother knows every little detail.

And so these women are brought before King Solomon, who is judging these effectively court cases, and they tell the story. And one points and says no, it's my baby, and the other one says no, it's my baby, it's my baby, it's my baby, and they go back and forth. And he says bring me a sword. And they bring him this giant awesome sword made of Valyrian steel and it's scary and he's holding it, and he says cut the baby in half, and give one half to each mother. Right? And the first woman says no lord! Give her the baby, only let him live. And the second woman says, no cut him in half, if we both can't have him, then he shouldn't live. And Solomon says give the baby to the first one, she's the mother. And of course this is brilliant, especially a thousand B.C., that this king is not only able to discern so rightly, but to create such a display of justice. It's just a great story. So that displays it sort of a small taste of his great wisdom.

But then the other story in 2nd Chronicles just says that after he asks for wisdom from God, he just becomes incredibly wealthy. Seems to be that he's maybe trading chariots or something with the south, but you just observe that he has this incredible wealth.

Okay, so this story then about Solomon, through his trials, through one of the most probably challenging days of his life, asks God for what – wisdom, this becomes embedded in the Jewish mind. Now fast forward to the scripture reading for today, its James chapter 1. Now the book of James was written by James, the brother of Jesus after the resurrection and ascension. And may I just say that there are many arguments for why Jesus was raised from the dead, but my favorite is that this guy had four brothers, and they all believed he was God. Do you have a brother? Anybody here? Yes, okay. If you've got a brother, and it doesn't matter how great he is. He could be the greatest guy ever, and one day he's like I'm the son of God. You're going to like.. yes, I don't know, I don't know. At least one of them is going to be like I don't know about that.

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The fact that his four brothers proclaimed his resurrection and that he was the messiah, to me having a brother, I don't know. That speaks volumes to me. I don't know about you.

But anyway, one of them is James, who is the leader of the church in Jerusalem, and he's a rabbi. I mean the guys is a Hassidic, Orthodox rabbi. He's followed all the rules, just as Jesus was. He's totally a Jewish guy, and he's speaking to a Jewish audience that has this Solomon asking for wisdom story sort of embedded in their mind and in their culture. And the book of James, which is often called a letter, was actually a sermon, and the sermon was so powerful that they then sent it, it says the twelve tribes. They sent it all over the world for everyone to read.

And he begins with this opening statement. "Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds." Why? Why would that be pure joy to face a trial? "Because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance" – everybody say let perseverance. See this is something Hannah noticed when she memorized it. It's something you don't really have to do, you just have to let it happen. Just let it happen. "Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be," and this is a promise, number one "mature." Mature is a funny one. Nobody here is praying for maturity. I just guarantee that. How many of you prayed for maturity? I'm mature, I've got it, I don't need it, I don't want it, I don't need it. Maturity is a part of wisdom.

We had a pastor once who used to mock maturity. When we were in college, and he would say something like 'everybody always says mature, mature. It sounds like manure.' But anyway, people asking for maturity.

So this is a part of the promise that you'd be complete. God would make you complete. And finally, "lacking nothing." You just live a life completely without lack if you let it finish its work within you and you persevere.

And then he says "if any of you lacks wisdom," you should what? Ask God. Who asked God for wisdom? Solomon! And look at how God blessed him. God not only gave him wisdom, He gave him wealth and possessions and power and honor and forty years of effective reign. And he died at a ripe old age! So if we lack wisdom, we should ask God, and he says "who gives generously to everyone without finding fault." What do you mean without finding fault? Doesn't matter how sinful you are, how dumb of mistake you made, how in the rut you are, how far behind you are, if you ask God for wisdom, He will be overjoyed with it, and He will give it to you in abundance, so ask and watch what He does with it.

What if whenever we were going through difficult times, we just said Lord, give me wisdom in this, give me knowledge. It's good that we pray for God's deliverance. The Bible tells us to pray for those things, it does, but it also tells us to pray for wisdom. Lord, let this change me.

That reminds me of something that's so important to the Christian walk. When we can't change something, we ask God to change us. Lord, use this thing to change me. Use this thing to change me. It's amazing how many times I have seen in my life where I'm just trying to serve the Lord, and it feels like it's one failure after another; it's just swimming upstream, I'm not getting anywhere, and I look back at those failures, most of which are embarrassing. And I recognize that God was training in me, He was doing a good work in me, He was preparing me for something else.

One of the most obvious examples is my bizarre run-in with television. My whole, like my whole young adult life, not knowing at all that I would be doing this someday. I still remember when I was 18, I was asked to go to Hanover by David Mainse, a wonderful man, he passed away a couple years ago, pastor and he owned various TV channels. And to be effectively like a news anchor type person, and I got to interview all these super stars and famous DJ's and I would like cover these things which was called the Expo Five Thousand. And they had all these expos for different countries, so I'd go. And I had like no experience with television, and really honestly I don't know why I went on this thing. I was just like sure I'll take a free trip to Germany.

So I'm speaking to this camera and if you've ever spoken to a camera before on video, it just kind of does something to you. It's hard to be you. It's hard to be natural. And I got up there and I would just try and say a simple intro, and I would do multiple takes, and there's a whole crew standing around watching me and I would just keep messing up, and this was exacerbated by the fact that I had pretty bad acne, so that would like really pop on camera. The whole thing was really humiliating for me. And I even remember once like the whole crew took a lunch because I was taking too long. Really! And I was like oh, all right. I felt like nobody wanted to work with me, and rightly so. I wasn't good. But I couldn't leave. I couldn't escape. I couldn't get out of this.

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And over time, I learned how to speak to a camera, and it took months of grinding through this embarrassing, and that's the word, humiliating process, every day. Getting dressed, getting showered, and just rubbing my forehead thinking can I do this another day?

And then years later, we were invited to do the show called The Messengers, which was TLC's biggest show. I was asked to be a judge; we were kind of at a transition point in our life, didn't know what we were going to do, and all of a sudden I was invited to like judge these people's speeches. I had studied religions and philosophy and things, so they thought I was a good fit, and I was on TV all the time, and this was going to be the big show. We had this big thing, and I got to meet Dan Rather, and all these other famous people. You remember Dan Rather. Anyway, so I thought this was my thing! It paid me really well! I was like this is awesome, this is going to be like the thing I do. I'm going to be a TV star. Have you ever heard of The Messengers? I know. I know. It actually didn't rate terribly, but it didn't rate well enough to endure 2007, which was the time when everything was being shaken up and so the network didn't renew the show. It was a good show, though. That was a bummer for me. Felt like another failure. Felt like another embarrassment.

Little did I know that four years later, Crystal Cathedral would go bankrupt, we were doing a church plant, and that some of the folks here at this ministry said hey, we need you to come and preach. Nancy Warshaw, who's downstairs, and John, who was the CEO at the time, my grandparents and some others said you should go, just preach. And so I did it and it was just easy. The cameras didn't bug me, the makeup didn't bug me. It did the first time, but then I was like that helps with the acne, so it evened out.

And I just see that God, in those what I thought were humiliating failures, was God preparing me for this. I would have never, ever started a TV ministry. I had no idea the amazing affect that TV and live streaming can have for all of you at home. Some of us here, we don't understand the impact it's having on people all around the world. It really is changing lives. I'm so thankful that God trained me; that I went through the arduous process back then instead of now. That I came in, in a way, not totally prepared, but prepared enough.

And that's what happens. Wisdom, our difficulties and our challenges that we face, they come through our suffering. They come through our embarrassing mistakes. You have to be bad at something before you're good at it. It's just that simple. And very often, we don't think about how all those moments that we wish we hadn't gone through, maybe can make us a little bit wiser.

So if you're going through something today, I want to encourage you: pray for God's deliverance, pray for God's help, He will help you, He will get you through this, but first, pray for wisdom and you will please the heart of God, and He will give it to you in abundance.

So Lord we ask that, in Jesus' name. Father, through all of our trials, all of our difficulties, all of the things that we have to face in the coming weeks, perhaps we feel anxious or nervous about it, Lord, we just ask give us wisdom, give us everything we need to achieve victory for you, and it's in your name we pray, amen.