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Hour of Power, 05.04.2020

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: And welcome visitors and church family. We are so glad you're here. Today know that God is with you at this very moment. Did you know even some of the greatest heroes in the Bible had times that they cried out and said God, where you are you? Why have you abandoned me? But if you keep reading their story, you see that God was with them, and He was faithful. And He is with you right now, and you are so loved.

BS: And we're so grateful you're joining us at this very moment. Believe you are here in this church or watching because God wants you to hear something today that will touch your heart.

Let's begin with a word of prayer: Father, thank you so much for all you're doing in our lives. And Lord, I'm praying for anybody who's coming here this morning that feels like they're down to nothing; that wonders why they're completely alone. And Lord, we know and recognize that it's in these moments when we have nothing that we experience everything. That it's in those moments that we get the breakthrough, the miracle, the thing we're looking for. And so I'm praying for that for people that are here, Lord, for a breakthrough in your name, Jesus, and it's in your 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 – Acts 12:12-15 – Hannah Schuller

In preparation for the message, Acts 12:12-15:

When this had dawned on him, he went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying. Peter knocked at the outer entrance, and a servant named Rhoda came to answer the door. When she recognized Peter's voice, she was overjoyed and she ran back without opening it and exclaimed, "Peter is at the door!"

"You're out of your mind," they told her. When she kept insisting that it was so, they said, "It must be his angel."

God is watching over you, child of God. He is with you. Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER – Russ Jacobson

This morning we want to pray, and we want to pray for different types of prisons. There are prisons, there are actual prisons, there are mental prisons, and so often in life we encounter these obstacles and these roadblocks that imprison us. So will you pray with me this morning?

Heavenly Father, thank you for this day, this chance to worship you, Lord this glorious morning, and we are so thankful that we are free to do so. But we are mindful of the prisons in our lives, whether it be the mental prison of loneliness and despair and depression, those who cannot see a light and a way out of the darkness, Lord, we just pray that you would reach into their hearts, Lord, and then you would show them that there is hope and we will run, run, run back to hope.

And Lord, we pray for those who are in actual prisons, people who have been convicted rightfully and we pray that you would help them, they would find Jesus and they would be rehabilitated.

For those who are wrongly accused, Lord, we pray for their release. We pray for those persecuted Christians around the world who are not free to worship you, Lord. We just lift them up and we pray that they may be able to shout out your name in public and worship you as they please.

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And we are thankful for the angels that you have sent into these lives, Lord, whether it be a friend sitting us down for coffee and helping us to know that this is not the end – there is a way out, whether it be a family member approaching us for forgiveness, Lord, whether it be people advocating for those unjustly accused in social justice. Lord, we thank you for the angels that speak into our lives are not heavenly forms, but earthly forms. And Lord we thank you most of all for our relationship with Jesus, our rock, our anchor, our Savior.

We remember these words that He taught us saying: Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever.

DECLARATION – Bobby Schuller

Friends, would you hold your hands out like this as a way of receiving, let's say this creed 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. Amen!

MESSAGE – Bobby Schuller "It Must Be His Angel"

Today we're going to talk about the nearness of God, that God is always near, and in the times when we feel completely alone, isolated, forgotten, when we feel like we're down to nothing, when we feel like we've run out of money, we've run out of opportunities, very often that is when we as disciples of Jesus Christ experience God the most. This is one of the most annoying things about following Jesus is that the Lord loves to get us sometimes in places where we really feel like we're at the end of our rope and that there's no one else to turn to but Him.

And I think that one of the reasons He does that is one, stretching is good for us, but two, it's in those times that after we get through, we can truly say God met me there; God provided for me; God got me through. So that when we're in those times of health, in those times of plenty, in those times of success, we know where it comes from, and there's a deeper meaning to it all.

If you're here today and you're down to nothing, I want to tell this quote that my dad, I think is so brilliant, my dad has said many times in many sermons and it's helped me a lot in my life, and that is: "if you're down to nothing, God is up to something." It's absolutely true that this is just how God is. When we feel like we've completely run out, we are not alone. God is near. And He's not just near through His Holy Spirit, and He's not just near through friends and people in the church, but He's also near through His angels.

And the Jews and Christians for many years have believed that sometimes; they've wondered, at least, does God ascribe angels to people? Are there angels that are assigned to certain individuals? Are there these things called guardian angels? How many of you grew up as a kid believing in guardian angels, or believe in guardian angels now? I remember as a kid thinking a lot about that, like looking over in my bed, being all alone and thinking is there an angel like sitting right here?

And though there isn't an orthodox answer to that question, I like to think there is. And actually that view is not a Catholic or Christian view, or didn't originate with Catholics and Christians, it originates actually in the Jewish worldview. That God ascribes to every Jew or to every believer an angel that oversees them, that guides them, that ministers to them, that enacts in their life.

And I'm not here to necessarily answer that question, except to say that the belief in something like that makes sense because if you do life long enough with the Lord, you find out very quickly He is always near. He's always near. You're not alone.

It's easy to feel alone in this world, isn't it? It's easy to feel isolated. I don't know about you, but for me it's hard to compare myself to other people. If you're a highly relational person, which is a good thing, if you're an empathetic person, which is a good thing, it's easy to look around at the great relationships around you: other marriages, other friends, people who are really close to their kids, people who are really close to their grandkids or to their parents, who have really tight families. My parents were divorced and I had to go back and forth between families. It was easy for me to compare my life to families that had it all together. Little did I know none of them had it all together.

See that's the thing is we always compare what we don't have to what everybody else has, especially in our relationships. And today in an age of Instagram and Facebook, very few people are posting fights with their spouse, fall outs with their children, feeling lonely, sitting on the couch eating popcorn with a glass of wine wondering will I always be here? Some of you hope you'll always be there.

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Look it's easy to feel like I'm alone in life, or why can't I get married, or why can't I have kids, or why can't I be close to the people in my life? I want you to know that it's in these times when you feel most alone that if you let Him, God can do something really great in your life, and you can experience in those times of solitude if you choose to do something like go on a walk or go deeper into times of prayer and seek God in those moments, its sometimes in those moments that you realize most of all that God is always near. Isn't that strange? That when we don't have a TV to distract us, or music to distract us, or friends to distract us, or family or work, we have nothing to distract us, sometimes that's when we realize more than any, that God is near. And that if we're down to absolutely nothing, if we feel like, you know, our health is no good anymore, or our relationships are no good anymore, or we're just never going to get that job, I just want to remind you what my dad said – when you're down to nothing, God is up to something. My life is a testimony to this.

Yours might be, too, that the times when you were at what you thought were the worst times in your life financially, health wise, relationally, that was right at the point where God did something, at least in my life, God did something great in my life. And I want to encourage you if you feel like you're there, I just want you to believe and trust and even pray and ask that God will use this time of little, this time of lack, this time of wandering to do something great in your life. He can and He will. His timing is annoying. It's annoying. It's always eleventh hour and the fifty ninth minute. That's how God is, and it's annoying, but it's faithful. God is so faithful and He's so true, and He will get you through what you're going through.

Very often I believe God does, even though we don't experience it this way, if we can put on like glasses and see the spiritual world, I believe we would see angels running around doing things for God in our lives. Wouldn't that be a bizarre thing to experience?

And so I want to talk about that today, about a story about when Peter was down to absolutely nothing, probably thought he was going to die, unfairly, and wondered if he was about to go to heaven, and what was going to happen to the church, and how people praying for him somehow activated this angel in his life to rescue him.

First: guardian angels. Are they real? I don't know. What's the Presbyterian or what's the Reformed view, I don't know. Some yes, some no. Everybody.. who knows. But all of us as believers, we believe in angels and we inherit this view of angels from a Jewish worldview. It's centered right in the middle of it.

In Jesus' day, very often we take these two groups of people, the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and we always sort of group them together. Now this is a big mistake because the Pharisees and the Sadducees hated each other. They couldn't have been any more different from one another. The Pharisees, which many of them are actually very good, have this view of life that there are angels and demons. There are miracles. There is spirit. That the whole Old Testament is the word of God, and that there are angels, and that these angels work in our lives.

The Sadducees, however, were kind of this wealthy, political class of Jewish leaders. They didn't believe in any of those things. They only believed in the first five books of the Bible, they were all about making political relations with the Roman government, they did not believe in an afterlife. They did believe in God, but only the God that was represented in the Torah, the first five books of the Bible. And they were honestly kind of more politically religious, and their job was to oversee the temple. Now that may sound super religious and it is, but remember that the temple isn't just the center of worship, all of Israel's money was kept in the temple. It was like the federal bank.

It was the main place of gathering for all sorts of events, religious events. There was a business square there where trading was happening. So this temple mountain was the center. This is what Sadducees oversaw. They were kind of like those politicians how every politician is a Christian, but you wonder if they have any relationship with God at all, if they really pray, if they really believe any of this stuff. That's kind of how the Sadducees were.

This is important because the Sadducees who don't believe in miracles, and don't believe in angels, are the ones who really put Jesus to death, and they are the ones who oversee the temple, where this story is going to take place.

Now the temple in Jesus' day was usually not called the temple, or the temple mount, it was called the house. Everybody say the house. The house! That's what everybody said. When they were going to go there or they were going to go to the house. If you're reading your New Testament, you need to look for this, especially in the gospels. But for example in Acts chapter 2, many people when they read it, they picture it happening in an actual house or in an upper room of a house from Acts chapter 1. Most scholars believed that the house they're referring to is the temple.

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When the whole house shook, when the spirit of God fell, the whole temple shook. That's why there were thousands of people there to witness it and to see it.

So when the apostles were gathered, it's likely that it wasn't an upper room somewhere else, it was actually probably at Solomon's colonnade, which is that front part there of the temple, and that some crazy thing happened where the spirit, which is something that's happened before at the temple, fell with power upon the believers, and they testified to the resurrection of God, and many came to faith. And those people who came to faith began gathering at Solomon's colonnade, right there at the front of the temple. Thousands of people could gather there, it's a shaded spot, and so every day the believers would gather there in the temple, remember because they're Jewish, they would gather there, and testify to the gospel, and people started experiencing miracles and power.

And so all of these people begin gathering at Solomon's porch or colonnade at the temple because they want to engage with the apostles, or get a miracle, or see God do something great. And this is a big problem for the Sadducees. Why is it a big problem? Why? There are no miracles! There are no angels! There is no heaven, there is no spirit. This isn't supposed to be happening. So it's creating a problem for the Sadducees and this great move of God is happening.

So Peter, of course, is the leader of this movement, and one of the most famous stories is when he heals this lame man at the gate called Beautiful. It's a great story. There's this guy who's been begging at the gate called Beautiful every day for like thirty years. Everyone who's a regular at the temple knows who this guy is, they bring him in, they carry him in, and then they carry him out.

Imagine if we had that here at the church, that there was a gentleman who had been out there since this church was built. For the last thirty years, you could count on it that Joe was leaning against the thing, asking for money or food or something, just sitting out there every day and some people gave him money and some people didn't, and he couldn't walk or something like that. And one day he came up here, and we all knew his name, we'd seen him every day, and he came up here and testified the gospel. That would be powerful, wouldn't it? And this is sort of what sets off this incredible move of God.

And so the Sadducees have a terrible time of it. They keep trying to arrest the apostles. In fact the first time Peter and John, when they're doing all of these miracles, the Sadducees arrest them and keep them overnight, and they command them stop preaching. They literally say you're making us look bad. And Peter and John just say we have to testify to the resurrection of God.

This happens again, this group continues to grow in Solomon's colonnade, an amazing story that people from villages all over want their sick healed, and some people have believed that if Peter's mere shadow went across them that they'd be healed, and many were. And so they'd have these sick people lined up on I guess it would be the north side of Peter so that as he walked by, his shadow would heal these people. I mean just imagine the power of God in that place, and what God was doing.

Peter eventually and the apostles get arrested a second time. They're put in jail, and the Sanhedrin decides they're going to gather and have this big court experience, so all the leaders, 71 of the great elders of the Jewish faith decide they're going to gather and they're going to hold this sort of kangaroo court for Peter and the apostles. And an angel comes and releases them from the prison, and says go back to the temple and preach.

And I love this story because everybody puts on their ceremonial robes, and they have all the candles lit, and all of the things are open and they go now go retrieve the prisoners. And the guard goes okay, I'll be right back. Comes back and says my lord, we don't know where the prisoners are. And then somebody says look! There they are, they're preaching in the temple again! So this is incredibly embarrassing for the Sanhedrin and for the Sadducees.

Well this keeps happening over and over, this persecution and this difficulty keeps coming upon the disciples, and finally it reaches a high point where they begin killing people. We talked about the first martyr a couple months ago, Stephen, who testifies against the Sanhedrin and they stone him for that. Later, there's a guy named Herod Agrippa. The Herod thing can get really confusing if you read the Bible a lot because there's no fewer than six Herod's mentioned in the New Testament. Herod Agrippa is the one in this story, and he puts James to death by the sword, and this is a big deal because James is the first of the 12 disciples who's actually put to death as a martyr. And so now it's getting serious.

With this, the church begins to be very afraid. They probably leave the temple at this point, and they begin to gather at a guy named John Mark's house. He's the author of the gospel of Mark. And his mother's a very wealthy, but a very godly woman.

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She has this beautiful home, has a grand courtyard and probably a hedge or walls around it so it's a safe place to meet. And that's where the church begins to gather after the death of Stephen and James. More in hiding, because they recognize that even though God was on the move in the temple, that they were in great danger. So they begin to gather there, and they begin to pray, and they begin to hope for a time that they can come back to the temple or see God move in this great way.

Well of course Peter continues to preach anyway in the temple, because Peter is Peter. He's the man, right? Miracles, power, and he probably knows he's going to be arrested and he is. Herod Agrippa, seeing that the Sanhedrin was happy with the death of James, arrests Peter, and he's going to put him to death. The only problem is it's during the time of the feast of unleavened bread.

Now this was an amazing time when thousands of people from all over the world would come and it's hard to imagine what the temple would have been like in the first century. The passion people had for God; the way in which they would so want to be in God's presence. And they had rules, and one of those rules was you couldn't kill somebody during the feast of unleavened bread. But they also knew that Peter, man, he was a Wiley one. Somehow he could just get out. And so they decide. So Herod puts four squads of four men to guard Peter. And if you're Peter, you're thinking there is no way I'm getting out of this.

So imagine whenever Peter is sleeping, he has two guards sleeping on either side of him, hip to hip. And at the door, there are two more guards guarding the door. And he knows when this feast is over he's going to get his head chopped off. And imagine how it feels to be Peter. You're leading this great movement, God is doing something great, Peter must just be like God, where are you? How did it get to this? He must be feeling hopeless.

Maybe you're feeling hopeless now. Maybe you feel like, you know, the world creates so many of these illusions, especially when you're in the middle of it, you think there's no way I'm getting out of this, there's no way I'm going to get my breakthrough, there's no way I'm getting out of this prison. I want you to know we serve a God of miracles. I have seen these miracles. And the great testimonies that happen when we get the breakthrough, oh, such an important and awesome part in that relationship we have with the Lord.

So Peter is laying between these two soldiers, he's going to be executed soon, and the church gathers at John Mark's mother's house and for days they're not at the temple celebrating, they're not rejoicing, they are praying like crazy that God will rescue Peter.

And prayer does things, guys. Prayer truly, truly makes a difference. I sometimes wonder if we truly knew what prayer could accomplish in our lives, if we wouldn't just spend most of our time just praying like crazy. It's amazing how the needle is actually moved in our lives and the lives of people we love when we pray. And when all we can do is pray, sometimes we think we're in the worst position, sometimes we're in the best position. Because as my dad says, when you're down to nothing, God is up to something. And perhaps the reason God's timing is so annoying, or perhaps the reason He always waits until we're down to nothing is because the only time we pray is when we're down to nothing. The only time we pray is when we feel like we have nowhere else to go. That's true in my life, sometimes. Don't wait until you have nothing to pray. Pray like crazy all the time and watch God do something great in your life.

Well we talked about guardian angels. In the Jewish view of guardian angels, was that God assigns an angel to every single person, and that sometimes people could see these angels, and this is the best part: if you saw your angel, the angel would look like you. Now I'm not saying this is true or this is actually what happens, but this was the first century Jewish belief, that if somehow God opened your eyes to see your guardian angel, you would see like a mirror reflection of yourself.

Let's imagine for a moment: so Peter is laying there between these two soldiers and this dark, dank room is filled with light. And this angel, presumably his angel, kicks Peter and he says hey, get up. Now when I read this story, this text doesn't say this, but imagine Peter looks up at a shining bright version of himself. I mean it would be kind of a trip. It'd be kind of a weird experience.

And so I don't know if that's what happened, but something happens, so this angel kicks him and he says let's go. His shackles fall off. I don't know what happens to the guards. I don't know if they got knocked out or what happened. The angel opens the door, he gets outside of the house, and then the angel disappears. But the whole time Peter is in like this weird state where he's trying to figure out what's going on.

He gets out of the prison, out of the temple, and he wanders to John Mark's parents house, and he knocks on the door and this girl named Rhoda, who's a servant, comes to the door because what are all the people doing? They're praying. They're praying for Peter like crazy. They've been praying.

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Maybe they're fasting. They believe that God can do something great. So Rhoda comes to the door: knock, knock, knock, knock, knock. They're all scared, they're in persecution. Who is it? Rhoda, it's Peter. Peter! She runs back out, she says guys we have to open the door! It's Peter! And they're like, you're crazy. There's no way Peter got out of that prison. They're like guys, it's Peter, I'm telling you, it's Peter. And what do they say? They say it's probably his angel.

Now isn't it funny that it's easier for them to believe that it's Peter's guardian angel than it is it's actually Peter? I don't know why this amuses me, and the fact that it actually has the possessive pronoun, it's not God's angel but it's Peter's angel, is also interesting to me and points to this view of a guardian angel. Maybe we're interpreting wrong. Maybe it's supposed to be like his spirit, like he's dead. But they say it must be his angel. She's like guys no, it's Peter. And so they let him in, and they rejoice, but Peter tells them about what happened, and they move on.

But there's another passage, too, that says in Matthew chapter 18:10 that shows this other kind of Jewish view. Jesus says "see that you do not despise one of these little ones" He's speaking of children "for I tell you that" what? They're angels. What does that mean? "That their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven."

So I don't know, look I don't know if there are guardian angels like if there's one angel that's ascribed to you, but I kind of think there is. And this is just Bobby talking; this is not a Reformed Church approved message. This is just Bobby talking, okay? Like every Christian believes that there are angels, but what if God has assigned to you an angel along with His Holy Spirit to sit by you and to be with you in the times when you're the loneliest.

What if when you think you're alone, you're not alone. That there is someone that your whole life has been walking with you, who's on your side, who loves you, who's protected you even though you couldn't see it, who is with Jesus proclaiming you the righteousness of God, the beloved of God, the called of God. What if that person is praying with you? These are all questions, but I think that in our imagination sometimes it's hard to think of God just spiritually always being with us, but what if it's not just His Holy Spirit, it is, but what if there is an angel that's assigned to you, or at the very least, that when we feel completely alone, when we feel totally isolated, when we feel abandoned, God says no. You have somebody with you. You may not be able to see them, you not be able to hear them, but maybe you can feel them.

And maybe when we're in those moments where we feel like we're completely alone, we can just close our eyes and just say Lord, let me feel your presence. I know there's been times where I've felt stressed out, alone, frayed, wondering, and there's something about just closing my eyes and imagining that behind the veil there's this whole spiritual world, that maybe even near me is an angel and that very near is the spirit of God, and to just say to myself God is near. Oh, He's so close. He's so close to us. He's so involved with us.

All the sin and bitterness and unforgiveness, and all that stuff that separated us from God, even though you may not feel it right now, I want you to know it's been taken care of. When you entrusted your life to Jesus Christ, all of that stuff was wiped away. All God sees when He sees you is the righteousness of His son, whom you've put on, and nothing can separate you from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus. Nothing can separate you from God's love. There's always hope.

If you've completely run out, if you feel like you're going to die, I want you to know there's always hope. Don't give up yet, because being a pastor, you get to see story after story after story of suffering people who experience miracles, breakthroughs, and it's easy, like when you've been going through difficult times to think it's always going to be this way, I'm always going to be stuck, I'm never going to get through it, I'm going to die, whatever. Remember what His word says – that He's always with us, and these stories that show us that how annoying His time truly is. His timing can be super annoying and super difficult and super frustrating.

So I want you to know that wherever you are, God is near, and He will get you through what you need to get through.

So Father, we thank you and we love you, and we trust in Jesus' name that whenever we think we're alone, we are not. Thank you, Lord that your spirit is always with us. Thank you that your angels are with us; that they're working in our life to do great things. And I just pray, God, give us faith to believe and to trust in you, and we ask all these things in Jesus' name, amen.