

Hour of Power Deutschland
Steinerne Furt 78
86167 Augsburg

Telefon: 08 21 / 420 96 96
Telefax: 08 21 / 420 96 97

E-Mail: info@hourofpower.de
www.hourofpower.de

Baden-Württembergische Bank
BLZ: 600 501 01
Konto: 28 94 829

IBAN:
DE43600501010002894829

BIC:
SOLADEST600

Büro Schweiz:

Hour of Power Schweiz
Seestr. 11
8594 Güttingen
Tel.: 071 690 07 81
info@hourofpower-schweiz.ch
www.hourofpower-schweiz.ch

Spendenkonto:

PostFinance AG, 3030 Bern
Konto: 61-18359-6
IBAN:
CH1609000000610183596

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INVOCATION – Bobby Schuller, Hannah Schuller und Haven Schuller

BS: This is the day the Lord has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it. Hello.
HS: Hello church family and welcome visitors. We are so honored that you've joined us today. You know, I don't think I know a single person who hasn't somehow had some hardship in 2020, but for some of you there's been something even more tragic in 2020, or some really emotional heaviness, or something really, really tough that turned so heavy that you've gone through. But I want to let you know that that does not mean that God's favor and God's blessing has left you. You know, David, when he fought Goliath and he defeated him, everybody said wow! Like David is so favored by God. He defeated this Goliath. But shortly after that, David went through some of the most horrific times of his life. He was stuck in a cave and running for his life, and in the midst of that, he said surely the Lord rewards the faithful, and boy did God do that. God turned it around. He became king of all Israel, and not just king, but one of the most famous and favored kings Israel has ever had. If you are in a heavy time, keep loving God with all of your heart, with all of your mind and your soul and your strength. God rewards the faithful, and He is with you. You are loved.

BS: Amen. Preach it, girl. We're so glad you're here, and that really is a good word to you. We want you to hear that God's best is yet to come in your life. And it is hard when you've lost stuff, but we're just believing for you and we want you to know we love you. God, we thank you so much that you've called us to this place. We're looking to you, Lord, and we pray for your abundant blessing, your forgiveness, your renewal. Lord, we love you, it's in Christ' name we pray, amen.

HAVEN: Amen. Turn to the person next to you and say God loves you and so do I.

SCRIPTURE - Deuteronomy 28:1-2, 12-13 - Hannah Schuller

In preparation for the message, Deuteronomy 28:1-2 and 12-13:

If you fully obey the Lord your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations on earth. All these blessings will come on you and accompany you if you obey the Lord your God. The Lord will open the heavens, the storehouse of his bounty, to send rain on your land in seasons and to bless all the work of your hands. You will lend to many nations but will borrow from none. The Lord will make you the head and not the tail. For if you pay attention to the commands of the Lord your God that I give you this day and carefully follow them, you will always be at the top, never at the bottom.

Church family, seeking God's favor is one of the most brilliant things we can do. Amen.

Favor Wins in the Long Run”

INTERVIEW – Bobby Schuller (BS) with Tony Bancroft (TB)

Tony Bancroft is an animator and a native of Orange County, California. For over a decade, he worked for Disney Feature Animation and was the supervising animator for Pumbaa the Warthog in The Lion King and co-director of the animated classic Mulan. In 2002, he left Disney Animation to found Toonacious, a Christian-themed animation studio — a move that stretched and tested his faith. In addition to his extensive experience in the animation field, he is also an author, a podcast host, and a program director and associate professor at Azusa Pacific University.

BS: Tony, hi! Welcome.

TB: Hi, thank you for having me.

BS: This is such a joy for us, and it's really fun for a lot of people here, because you have a lot of Disney fans in the house, including yours truly. Missing Disneyland, but we're so glad to have you.

TB: I know, COVID will bring us together back into Disney world once again.

BS: Yes.

TB: I brought a little Disney with me, you can tell from my office, my home office here.

BS: It's so cool to have you, and it's fun to see all that cool stuff behind you. Looks like you're drawing something. Is that what's his name from.. the guy from Seinfeld, what's his name, Kronk?

TB: Yes, it's a little rough drawn of Kronk here.

BS: That's awesome! Very, very cool. Well, Tony, you've had such an awesome, it's a pretty incredible career for an animator, especially, and for a lot of people that don't know, can you tell us a little bit about your story and about your faith?

TB: I actually accepted Christ into my heart when I was younger in junior high, and I thought that was it for me. I'm on a path that will only bring me closer to Jesus my entire life. But when I got into actually working at Disney and I became very consumed with this is about me. I got myself here. I built up my talents and I started to forget about what Christ had done for me. And there was a real change that happened after I finished co directing Disney's Mulan, the original animated one, not the new one, but after I finished that, I decided I wanted to leave Disney so I could start my own faith-based production company, animation production company called Toonacious. And I did that and that was like jumping into the firing pan. I had built up a lot of comfort at Disney, I think, and to really kind of just live my life totally for Christ was a big deal for me. That's led me on a journey now that's lasted my whole life, and I continue to serve Christ by what I do and using my talents for Him.

BS: I love stories like yours because Disney for an animator, I mean that's about the best you can do, isn't it, in terms of the marketplace. I mean working on Mulan and Emperor's New Groove and some of these other movies. By the way, I've been told I look like the llama from Emperor's New Groove. Do you see it?

TB: You look like a llama? That's not a compliment. I don't think that's a compliment.

BS: I'll take it as a compliment. I'll take it as a compliment. But I think for a lot of people it would have been just an incredible thing to have this and I just love when people are courageous like you. I mean you had.. it wasn't just a good job, it was a good paying job, you're married, you got kids, I mean was it hard for you to move away in that way?

TB: It was. Like you said, I had three daughters by that point, and they were all under the age of 10, so they were all very young. We had the nice big house, white picket fence, the whole thing. And so when I came home and I told my wife I feel like God is calling me to leave Disney, she was like you better check that because He ain't telling me that. But He did. I mean after about, it took another six months of her really prayerfully going before the Lord and listening to His voice, and through scripture and all that kind of stuff, we really came to the same place, and left Disney, started our own animation company producing videos called Lenny and Sid, and we did that for several years, too. And now I teach, I do all kinds of stuff, but I share the gospel in whatever I do, whenever I can.

BS: Was it hard when you were at Disney, I mean especially in the 80's and 90's, I've heard there was a lot of drama back then. I don't really know, it's all here say, but was it hard in that environment to be a Christian? I mean did you really go out of your way to kind of share God's love and encourage people or was it hard to be that way in that environment?

TB: It wasn't hard to show God's love, and I think that's something that I would put out there for anybody is that even in dark places, and yes Hollywood, Disney back then, Disney right now can be a dark place, for sure. But it's not hard for us to share the gospel through our lives, too, to be a light in a dark place. And people used to ask me back then, what are you doing working at Disney and being a Christian? Can a Christian really exist in that environment and all this kind of stuff?

Favor Wins in the Long Run”

I'm like where should we be as Christians if not in an environment like that. That's what Christ would do. That was my calling. I felt like this was my missionary field so yes, speaking about my faith to others, or even just living out a good and positive life as a Christian, and always giving God the glory. That was key to how I shared Christ.

BS: I just think it's so great that you did kind of jump out on your own and you did Toonacious and you did some of these other things and I'm sure just leaving that comfort zone had to be a horrible feeling. I feel like right now we're sort of re-gearing after, I feel like a lot of.. you've heard Disney, for example laid off, I think now over 28,000 people. There have been more layoffs. We've had a couple people here who got laid off who worked there part time and other things. There's going to be a lot of people at other businesses who've been laid off and there's going to be kind of a, I feel like a restart or rebuild even for America in the coming couple of years, and a lot of people are going to have to weigh some of these decisions. What advice do you give to someone who is thinking about either leaving where they're at, or going after something new like you did with your studios and your different things that you've done. Do you have a bit of advice like especially for now for someone that's looking at that world?

TB: I do believe that we as Christians can compromise, but we also live in the world even though we're not of the world. I really believe that how we achieve and show the best light of Jesus is trying to be excellent in whatever we do. I find that too many people getting into animation, the industry, even other industries, they just don't worry so much about being excellent and good at what they do as much as just being a Christian. And I think you can preach all day but if you're excellent at what you do and you give good advice, that you show love to others, sometimes that's really the best that you can do to really transmit Christ out there. And then the questions come, right? People gravitate to that. They gravitate to hopeful people, to positive people, and they want to know what makes you positive and that's the moments you shine.

BS: That's great. I love it, Tony, so that emphasis on just being excellent at your craft in your place so that your witness isn't tampered; that you really want to be a blessing to your team in a secular environment.

TB: You really do, yes, absolutely.

BS: Absolutely. Well Tony, thank you so much. Tony Bancroft, we just appreciate you and we're so thankful for your time with us, and it was so fun for us to meet an animator from Disney and a professor at APU, we're just so grateful to have you and we're so thankful for all you've done. And thanks for encouraging us today.

TB: Thank you so much. Thanks for having me.

BS: Okay. God bless you.

DECLARATION – Bobby Schuller

All of you who are here, would you stand with us? Hold your hands out like this as a way of receiving from the Lord, and would you say with us this creed as we do every Sunday: 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/PRAYER – Bobby Schuller " Favor Wins in the Long Run"

Today we're beginning a new series called Milk and Honey in which we are going to really be talking about the importance of investing in what matters. The way we spend our time, our money, our energy, our focus, we want to remember that God has a plan for us, but in order for us to obtain that plan, we have to have our priorities set. Today, I want to talk about that. And I want to talk specifically about this axiom that you may have heard in a church. It's from the scripture, it's something that God says to Abraham; he's going to say it in Zechariah when we read it later, and that is this: when God blesses us, He blesses us so that we can be a blessing. God loves to pour out goodness, good things in our life, to pour out health and vibrance, joy, success, sometimes financial blessing, but the ultimate purpose of that is so that we can not only be blessed, but be a blessing to our neighbor. I want to encourage you today not only that God wants to bless you, God wants you to prosper, God wants you to thrive, not only in this life but in the life to come, but that God also wants you to be a blessing to your neighbor and what a great feeling that is to be a blessing to someone. I can't think of a worse feeling than feeling like you're a burden, that you're a curse.

Favor Wins in the Long Run”

That you're holding everybody back, and I can't think of anything better than feeling like wow, I'm so glad this person's in my life. I can't think of anything that feels better than feeling like I'm a blessing to my wife, I'm a blessing to my kids, I'm a blessing to my colleagues or to my church, or to the random person I meet at the grocery store, at the bank, that when you feel as though your life, your choices, your gifts, your actions are a blessing, when you feel that way, you truly come alive and it is so easy to forget that feeling. Maybe you can think of a time when you felt like you were either a blessing to your neighbor or a curse to your neighbor. I remember in high school, I'd just moved to Oklahoma, I played JV basketball in 9th grade, and in 10th grade, I was like I'm going to make varsity. And so I went to the basketball tryouts and one of the things they had us do is pair off into two teams, and play a pickup game against each other. And I remember there was this moment I was so nervous. I'm in a new town, I don't know anybody on this team, and this ball bounces off the rim and I thought it was from the other team, and so as its going out of bounds, I obstruct to kind of keep it from getting retrieved, and it was our ball. I should have saved it. I could have easily grabbed it. And the captain of the basketball team, in front of everybody, just dressed me down because he was on my team and I didn't save the ball, and I easily could have. And I just remember for weeks just feeling like oh, what a horrible feeling that is. That I not only was neutral, I actually hurt my team. Or maybe you had an experience like that when you were a kid. You played soccer and you kicked the ball under the wrong net, and that's just a horrible feeling to feel like you're that person. The opposite feeling feels so, so good. One of the best compliments I ever got, I was on a missionary trip and I was one of the leaders, and I overheard someone say in another room 'gosh, I'm so glad Bobby is here. If he wasn't here, we'd be in trouble.' Man that felt good! Man, when somebody says something to your face that's nice, that feels good, but when you hear somebody talking good behind your back, man that feels great. And this is the thing. This is what we forget is that so much of the meaning in life doesn't come from being blessed. It comes from being a blessing and the more we do that, the better we get at it, actually. That actually being a blessing is a skill. Being a blessing is something you get good at. Being a blessing is something you practice, and the more you do it, the more you increase at it, whether its leading or generosity or encouragement or practicing your other gifts. When you're a blessing to your neighbor, you feel more alive. This is one of the greatest solutions to people who feel stuck in a pit; to people who feel like I'm stuck in this rut and I can't get out. One of the best things you can do is practice being a blessing to your neighbor. When God blesses you, it's a sign that He also wants you to not only be blessed, but to bless your neighbor. I'm surprised and sad that so many people interpret the scripture in this way. That to be blessed is a bad thing, or that God doesn't want us to be blessed Jeremiah 29:11, I always call this the most tattooed Bible verse in the world. I love this Bible verse, it's great, and it's for you: "I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord. Plans to prosper you" everyone say prosper (AUDIENCE RESPONDS – prosper) "and not to harm you. Plans to give you hope and a future." I want to ask you a very serious question, and this is specifically for people who have read a lot of Bible and done a lot of church: do you believe God wants you to prosper? Look, I'm shocked. Do you believe that what the word of God says in Jeremiah 29:11 is true? It's either true or it isn't. I once heard a guy who said well Jeremiah 29:11 is written for Jeremiah. I said are you crazy? No, it wasn't TO Jeremiah. Jeremiah said it to the whole Jewish Hebrew people who were in exile in Babylon. People who had lost everything. People who had lost everything because of their wickedness. People who had turned their hearts away from God and lost everything, God makes them a promise that if they are good to their neighbor, that if they do well where they're at, if they just continue to be a blessing to the Babylonians, that He will bring them home. And then he says to them "I know the plans I have for you. Plans to prosper you." The very first thing I want you to get in your head this morning or today is that God does want to prosper you. God does want to bless you. Yes, there are many people in the so-called prosperity gospel; we don't subscribe to that, who have taken this too far. Actually I remember at ORU once, we had a guest speaker who said.. he made everybody stand up and declare.. this is a true story: "Money" and we had to reach out in the air like we're grabbing money. He was.. "money cometh!" If you say cometh its more spiritual. "Money cometh!" And then you have to like pull it in "to me now." And like so we had all these kids stand up and go "money cometh to me now!" Of course that's silly. We're not talking about you having a Ferrari and a private jet. Of course if you have one that's great, and don't forget that Shepherd's Grove and Hour of Power are a tax deductible charity and you can send your gift. No, look. Look when I think of Biblical prosperity, I think of people thriving in what they do.

Favor Wins in the Long Run”

I think of people thriving in their work, whether they're a doctor or whether they're building a business, or whether they're an artist, that they are succeeding. That they're getting promoted and they're going places, but they're going with God and they're doing it God's way, and they're going at God's pace. But I still, like there are people who definitely say like the only purpose of the gospel is to prosper, and that's not true, of course. But just in the same way that many people are proud of what they have, there are a lot of people who are proud of what they don't have. And both of these are wrong, my friend. I want you to know that God loves people to live good, happy, joyful, prosperous lives, but to do it His way. And I want to encourage you. I want you to believe today and hold for yourself the fact that God does want you to prosper; that God does have a good plan for you. That God does have a hope for you. That God does have a future for you. The enemy wants to steal that hope from your heart, but I want to encourage you to hold it, especially if you're going through a hard time, to hold that in your heart. God loves you. God is for you. He who owns a cattle on a thousand hills sees you. You are His beloved child. You will never be anything but that, and I just want you to be encouraged today. So when we talk about milk and honey, we obviously think of the land of Israel. Through the whole, especially the Old Testament, there is this theme of God wanting to prosper His people in this holy place. This is an actual picture of Israel. Isn't that beautiful? One of my favorite places in the whole world. God told Abraham that this land, that his ancestors would live here, and it would be a land flowing with milk and honey. Do you remember what milk and honey means? Milk is a symbol for cattle or goats or cows, that there is pasture land here. And honey is a symbol for farmland. You might be like why do they say milk and honey instead of milk and grain? Obviously milk and honey sounds better. That's the answer. I don't know. But honey is a symbol for farmland. And so it's this idea that it's a land that has everything that someone in the ancient world would want. It's a land of green pasture. It's a land where God is going to see His people prosper and thrive and live a good life. In God's vision for Abraham and for the Hebrew people, is that they will be so blessed in this place, and that they will be a blessing to the other nations, the other races is another way to see it, that their neighbors who are different than they are, are going to be so abundantly blessed. Like Israel is going to be so blessed, like a cup that overflows, its prosperity and goodness and righteousness is going to spread as a blessing to all of its neighbors. This is the theme of the garden. Remember that the Garden of Eden – Eden was a place, and out from this holy spring or sacred place, some scholars even believed Eden was viewed as like a temple, that out of that place flowed a garden in a world that was bereft of any life. In the same way, that out of the temple flowed Jerusalem and Israel; that the temple itself was supposed to be a blessing. In the same way, God wants you to be so full of life, so thriving, doing so well that your life just spills over into your neighbors life, and that not only are you blessed, but you experience this idea that I really am a blessing to my neighbors. I really am helping my whatever it is, my kids, my neighbor, my friends, even my enemies, and I just believe God's going to do that in your life. This is God's intent for you – that you would be blessed so that you can be a blessing to your neighbor. What does it mean in the Bible to be blessed? What does that mean? The word in Hebrew is “Asher,” in Greek its “Makarios.” This word that's always translated as “blessed” in the Bible, sometimes when we think like “blessed are the poor in spirit,” we think that like it means righteous, or holy, or good. And obviously being righteous, holy and good is a good thing. But the word Makarios or the word Asher, probably a better translation is “happy.” Happy. Or maybe the best translation, it just doesn't come off this way, is that they're living the good life. They're living the best kind of life they can live because they are taking the narrow road; because they're living life God's way. That the best kind of life, a blessed life, a good life, is a life that is lived for the Lord and lived for my neighbor, for my near-dweller. This is the most joyful, successful, thriving life I can have. Yes, Asher and Makarios for sure mean material blessing, but they also mean happy. Deuteronomy 28 says that blessing is that “your cup will overflow. That your grain baskets will be full. That you'll be above and not beneath. That you'll be the head and not the tail.” This is God's promise for you. But it also means that even though God is pouring out abundance in your life, as the scripture says, so much that the heavens will open and there won't be enough room to contain it; that even though God is doing that in your life, you're also happy! Imagine that. Imagine people that even though they're thriving and succeeding and their baskets are full, and they're above and not beneath, and they're leading, they're also joyful, and that they're happy. That this is a promise, a scriptural promise to you in order that you can be a blessing for your neighbor. This is the great debate today, by the way, isn't it? What does it mean to live a good life? What does it mean?

Favor Wins in the Long Run”

If you were to really probe people, I mean people have this sort of obscure image of the good life being something like famous, beautiful, rich, traveling the world, maybe. Maybe you're not a rich, but you're always going to beautiful places with interesting people, eating all sorts of great foods, or some people think the good life means that you succeed academically and you have some of the best studies and you write big books that matter, and they're going to be on the shelf. Even in Christianity, a lot of pastors think that to have a good ministry means to be a big steeple pastor, or to have a mega church or a huge international ministry. And this narrative, this worldly view that like this is the good life alone, I think is harming people. When we get on Instagram, we see so many people on Facebook and other things, who just seem to be living better lives than ours. But don't forget, they're only showing us their best. They're not showing us when they get in a fight with their spouse. They're not showing us the times that they couldn't sleep at night. They're not showing us that they don't know their kids or their grandkids, or that they've been fighting with their parents, or that they just can't be happy, or they don't show us the times that they're struggling with addiction and depression and they don't show us these things. In fact it was really interesting because a few weeks ago, there was a story that broke about this so called Influencers on Instagram here in Southern California, Los Angeles, that many of the people who posted pictures of being on a private jet were actually just leasing a private jet studio. So you can see here, here's someone who did this, and they have this beautiful private jet, and you can sit there and take your Instagram picture, but you can see here is where the wall is removed and there's an office behind it, you see? This is a great story, isn't it? And it's a symbol for what the world has to offer. This is not a new thing. What it truly means to be blessed, the confusion surrounding that, especially for religious people, especially for people who want to seek after God, it can be confusing sometimes. Can I be rich or not rich? Can I be famous or not famous? If so, how much can I do it like the world and how much can I do it like the Lord? It's interesting because throughout the Bible, this seems to be a constant problem. Hannah and I enjoy reading the Bible. I think she's going through the Old Testament right now, and I think she even said the other day, it's so amazing how like God will bless the Hebrew people and they'll be thriving, and then somehow they'll just turn their hearts away from God and they'll start bowing down to other idols, and they'll start going to other places. And I remember once, you almost frustrated. You're like why do they keep doing this? But you have to remember in the Bible, that this is over hundreds of years and generations, that there are these weird cycles where as believers, it's so easy to be tricked by the fake jet. It's so easy to think that if I cut a few corners, if I break a few rules to get what I want, that I'll be happy when I get there. But the only blessing that's really worth it, my friend, is the blessing that's in God's kingdom. Doing it God's way. When we go after God with all our heart, when we remember the poor, when we remember those who were lonely, when we serve our neighbor, when we put our friends and our family before money, before our businesses, before our work, when we make what matters first, that we make what also matters less second, God, I think, just feels free to pour abundant blessing on our lives. And this is going to be the foundation for the rest of this series. If I want to say it in a nutshell, it's this: one, God wants you to prosper. Jesus told us to pray "on earth as it is in heaven." Let me tell you, there's no lack in heaven. There's no sick people in heaven, there's no depressed people in heaven. Jesus told us to pray "on earth as it is in heaven." Believe God wants you to prosper. Believe God wants you to do well in what He's called you to do. But also believe that the only way to really enjoy that prosperity is to be a generous person, is to understand the way we use our resources and our time. That the way we spend our time and our money, in particular, that we have to do it God's way. And as we do that, God essentially can bless you without harming you. Okay, I probably should get to the scripture. My time is almost over. Today I'm talking about 2nd Kings. And there's this amazing story. I love it. In the Bible, this prophet Elijah is an amazing miracle worker. In fact, many people before when they're prophesying to Jesus, even today many Jews, the person of Elijah functions as like the symbol of the Messiah so that when the Messiah comes, He'll either be Elijah or He'll be in the spirit of Elijah, or He'll be like Elijah. And that's because when you read 2nd Kings, you read this Jedi-like miracle worker, the amazing things He does. In this story, actually there's the king of Israel who is even wicked, God is still continuing to help him against another enemy king, and Elijah keeps telling the king, like hey the enemy is going to be here, so go over here. The enemy's going to be here, and so that the enemy king can't capture the Israel king.

Favor Wins in the Long Run”

And so Elijah just keeps helping his king in this way, and the enemy king finally comes to take Elijah, comes to his city, surrounds his city, and the Bible says that Elijah causes the whole army to become blind but really scholars believe that it's more like he caused them to be almost like in a daze, or almost to like not know what's going on, almost like they'd been clunked over the head. And so Elijah takes this huge army of Aram to the main city in Northern Israel, Samaria, brings them into this town center, surrounds them with guards, and then their eyes open and they see like they're completely disarmed and surrounded. And then this amazing thing happens – the king and all those people, they have mercy on these enemy soldiers. They break bread with them. They bless them and release them. I love that story. And then what happens is the king of Aram, who's been embarrassed, decides he's not going to let this rest. So he surrounds the city of Samaria, he assaults it again, and decides he's going to take Samaria, and it just goes into a horrible place. People begin starving to death. Ancient assaults of cities, they would cut off water if they could, they would always cut off food and trade so supplies, even simple things begin to go away. Usually waste becomes an issue because places back then didn't have good sanitation and sewers, and so over weeks and months the city begins to fester and the suffering is almost unbearable to the point where they begin to resort to cannibalism. Well Elijah tells them when they come to him, what should we do? We're surrounded by this army. And Elijah says tomorrow there's going to be an abundance of grain. There's going to be an abundance of everything. You're going to have everything you need, not just enough, you're going to have more than enough. And the next day, there are these lepers at the gate. Now lepers in the old world.. remember leprosy not only means losing fingers and body parts falling off, but some people, if you had like peeling on your skin, or any kind of skin thing, you had to be outside the city. I can't think of very many things in this life where I would feel more lonely, more sad to be a leper. If I were to get leprosy, I couldn't be with my family anymore. I couldn't go to the market anymore. Anytime I went to a public space, all the lepers have to yell "I'm a leper!" This is real. "I'm a leper! I'm a leper!" Everywhere they go if they're around people, "I'm a leper" and everybody has to stay far away from them. And so lepers are treated, very often, like garbage. They have to beg at the gate for food and for money, and even if they're skilled workers and they're not that sick, they can't be around other people. Well there are these four lepers at the gate who had been probably treated like garbage, who have never prospered, who have never done well. They probably have a lot of resentment towards the people in their city. And they're starving, too. And they see this horrible situation where they're surrounded by this army, but inside the city everybody's dying. And finally they say to each other, if we stay here, we're going to die. If we go into the city with the other people, we're just going to die with them. But if we go to the army, and if we ask for mercy, maybe they will feed us and take care of us. So in the middle of the night, these four lepers decide to pack up and cross over and greet the other army. And when they get there, they find everyone is gone. They had no idea, I believe because of Elijah's prophecy, that the army thought they heard the Egyptians coming or thought they heard chariots, and in a hurry, they left their whole camp and they fled back to Aram. And then you see that these lepers get to this empty camp, and it's full of food and grain and cattle and stores and all of the things an army needs to assault a city far away. And they just have all this abundance. And what they start to do is they begin to take the gold and the silver and all the grain and all these precious things, and they start taking them to secret places and burying them and they're thinking we're rich! We're rich! And then all of a sudden, this heavy feeling comes over them, this heavy feeling comes over them that they cannot do this to their neighbor. Now this is a moment of truth. Many of us will come to places like this where you've been treated like garbage, or maybe you've been overlooked, or maybe you've been ignored your whole life, and then all of a sudden you get this amazing, incredible windfall and you'll be at this crossroads where these lepers were. They had a choice to make – do we resent and turn our back on our neighbors who are hurting and keep all this good stuff to our self? Or do we tell them? And the scripture says that they were overcome with remorse and compassion for their city, that they went back to the city and they told them and the city was full of grain and full of cattle and fresh water and God brought prosperity through the lepers to the city. I just want to tell you that there are so many stories in the Bible where maybe that leper character decides to keep it to themselves and we know how that story goes, don't we. Something happens to them. Something horrible, you know? And at the very least, in life, when you're that person, that person that's been overlooked, that person who's been resented. Maybe you've been harmed in your life and you want to hold resentment in your heart to your neighbor, you feel like I don't need to help anybody anymore. I don't even need to help good people.

Favor Wins in the Long Run”

I've helped enough people in my life. I'm done. I'm living for me. I'm going to enjoy today. I'm just going to enjoy and live for myself. But friend let me tell you that is not a real blessing. Yes, it might be nice or fun for a couple of weeks, but eventually at the end of life, people need to feel like they're a blessing to their neighbor and not a curse. To feel like I'm a curse, to feel like I'm a burden is one of the worst things to feel in life, and you are not that. That is not you. But to know that I am blessing people, that I'm encouraging people, that I'm lifting people up, that with my time, my money, my effort, my hard work, I'm making a difference in people's life, at the end of the day, that's the only thing. That's the only thing really that's going to matter. That and how you stand with the Lord. When you come to a place and God is blessing you, remember He's blessing you to be a blessing. If you are blessed and not a blessing to your neighbor, I don't believe that what you have, your prosperity, will actually be prosperity. I don't think it will actually be a blessing to you. It will at first, but eventually it'll feel like nothing. It'll feel like chafe. It'll feel worthless, and you'll wonder why did I do all this work and effort for this thing? But if you bless your neighbor, if you put the important things first in your life, I believe that the prosperity that you experience in life will be a blessing. This is the wisdom of the scripture. It's not Bobby talking. This is thousands of years of sages, of our mothers and fathers who have passed these stories on to us to remind us when that comes, if we bless our neighbor, we will be blessed. It's what Zechariah says in Zechariah 8 verse 13. I'm going to skip just down to the end: "Just as you Judah and Israel have been a curse" and maybe some of you have been a curse to someone in your past. Not anymore. "Among the nations, so I will save you and you will be a blessing. Do not be afraid. Let your hands be strong." God's going to bless you, and you're going to be a blessing to your neighbor. Maybe you've lost everything. Maybe you're in one of the worst places you've ever been in life. With coronavirus and everything going on, there are many, many reasons why you could be in a bad place. But hold this hope in your heart that God is going to bless you. I believe you're going to prosper, but continue to do things God's way. When the blessing comes, remember to be a blessing to others, and as you do that, I believe prosperity will continue in your life. More than anything, I want you to know the Lord. At the end of the day, when we come to face death, we need to know that we're at peace with God. And if you're not at peace with the Lord, I want to encourage you today to make a decision today to follow Him with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. Many of us, of course, we have doubts and we don't know about certain things, but even if one percent of you believes that God is for you, if one percent of you believes in the Lord Jesus Christ, give God that one percent and watch Him turn your life around. I love you so much. I'm on your side. This whole church is on your side, and God is on your side and we want to see you thrive in life. I believe your best is yet to come and I can't wait to celebrate with you when you get there. Father, we pray in Jesus' name, I just pray over everyone under the sound of my voice. I pray Jeremiah 29:11 over everyone under the sound of my voice that people would know in their heart, by faith, that God has a plan; the plan is to prosper and to give a hope, to give a future, and I pray that we would hold that in our hearts and never let it go. Know that we're forgiven, we're loved, we're called, we're favored, we believe it, we claim it in Jesus' name, amen.

BENEDICTION – Bobby Schuller

Thank you all for being here. I know this is going to be a great week, and I just pray that it'll be abundant and blessed. 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 His peace in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, amen.