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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. Hello.

HS: Welcome visitors, welcome church family. It feels wonderful to be with you. You know, something that should make you feel amazing about yourself is that you are worth what God paid for you. You are worth what God paid for you, and you are so loved.

BS: That's very true. God doesn't do anything that's not worth doing. We are so glad to be here with you. We're missing our daughter today, she's visiting her cousin in San Francisco..

HS: For her birthday.

BS: I think she'll be back here next week, hopefully. I also want to say a big welcome to John and Freddie Charles. They are visiting us today. This is their last Sunday before moving to Texas, so they wanted to come to their church home. For those of you who don't know, John Charles was our CEO when I started and really helped bridge us from a lot of the tough times we were going to where we are now, so we're thankful to both of you the..

HS: Very dear friends to us.

BS:..many sacrifices you did to help us get where we are so we're thankful for you. And a safe, safe trip to Texas, an awesome state. We're so glad that you're here, too, and we just believe that God's going to do a good work in your life today. If you're going through something, a word from God can change your life forever. Father, we pray in Jesus' name that you would send your Holy Spirit to do a good work in our hearts and minds. We ask, God that in this time you would transform us even more into the image of Jesus. Thank you that you've forgiven us and you love us just as we are, not as we should be, and you believe in us and we're thankful for that. We believe in you, it's in Christ' name we pray, amen.

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

SCRIPTURE – 1. Samuel 24, 16 - 20 – Hannah Schuller

In preparation for the message, 1st Samuel 24:16:

When David finished saying this, Saul asked, "Is that your voice, David my son?" And he wept aloud. "You are more righteous than I," he said. "You have treated me well, but I have treated you badly. You have just now told me about the good you did to me; the LORD delivered me into your hands, but you did not kill me. When a man finds his enemy, does he let him get away unharmed? May the LORD reward you well for the way you treated me today. I know that you will surely be king and that the kingdom of Israel will be established in your hands. Church family, God blesses a humble heart. Amen.

Interview Bobby Schuller (BS) and Bill Bracken (BB)

Chef Bill Bracken is a nationally-renowned chef who has over 30 years of experience in the culinary world. After working in acclaimed restaurants for much of his life, he started volunteering in soup kitchens around Orange County and saw firsthand the great need many local families have for food. This inspired him to open up Bracken's Kitchen and food trucks, whose mission is to bring nutritious meals to those who need them most. In the past year alone, Bracken's Kitchen has served over a million meals to men, women and children in Orange County. Please welcome, Chef Bill Bracken!}

BS: Bill hi! Welcome! We're so glad to see you here again and it's been a long time, actually, that I used to wear a robe the last time we were hanging out. I forgot about that.

BB: I wondered if you were going to put one of those on. Thanks for having me back.

Fortress by the Salt Sea

BS: It's such a thrill. Tell us about Bracken's Kitchen and how you guys came about to be.

BB: I kind of forgot all that in the last year of this pandemic and stuff. But my story dates back to 2008 and 9 when the country went through this big downturn and the economy. I watched a lot of really good people lose their jobs. And that's when I first felt like God was calling me in a new direction with my career to feed people in need. It took me awhile to really figure that out but in short, God actually did for me what I couldn't do for myself and took me out of the hotel world when I lost my job at the end of 2011, and that's when I really knew that I had to do something. God was calling me. And of course, I say mine's a modern-day Jonah story – God was calling me here, I ran the other way. But all roads eventually led back to what is now Bracken's Kitchen.

BS: You lost your job in 2011 as a chef, and what happened? So you were like I'm just going to use my cooking skills to teach and feed and help the poor. How did that come about? Like how did that even happen?

BS: I wish it was that easy, but very quickly, I had been blessed with some success and very quickly someone called me and wanted me to help him open a restaurant. And I started making deals with God – let me do this and I'll do that, and all this back and forth, the whole while trying to figure out what Bracken's Kitchen might look like. I never realized that it would be a fulltime thing for me. I felt like this was what God was calling me to do on the side. But everything I tried to do – I had a wife, I had a young son at the time, my son was two years old at the time, two older kids, and I had my own mouths to feed at home and trying to figure out how to take care of them while trying to honor what God's calling me to do but a lot of roadblocks. I tried consulting, I opened this restaurant that eventually failed, just all roads kept leading to Bracken's Kitchen. Little steps of faith, slowly out into the deeper water until one day I did really realized everything that was moving forward in my life was Bracken's Kitchen or feeding people related and all this other stuff I was trying to take care of my family, just kept hitting roadblocks. So that was when I had to take the ultimate leap of faith and give all that up and move fulltime into doing this. My wife hadn't worked when I lost my job; someone reached out to her and gave her a job, which helped us financially, so I mean God was kind of lining everything up just to lead me down that road and I eventually had to follow.

BS: It is interesting how very often the path that God has for us, very often the doors open but we don't always want to walk through. And it sounds like that's kind of how you were, and you almost have to trust that like when you go through that door, that its where the Lord wants you to go, even though maybe financially you couldn't see how that was going to connect the dots to pay your mortgage and take care of your family. I know that you guys have fed an incredible amount of hungry people, which is amazing. But I'm sure the pandemic had an impact on you, right? I mean there have been a lot of people that have been struggling financially, especially in the entertainment and gig industry, LA/Orange County has a lot of those types of people. So it's been what almost ten years actually.. or not ten years but it's been a while, maybe six/seven years since we talked? How has COVID impacted your ministry and kind of how you're helping people?

BB: Well yes, I was trying to figure out when we last talked, I'm sure now because Caitlyn or someone told me, but we was at an old rental kitchen space and it's like God, I mean, of course God knows what's coming up, but He really moved us into a position to be ready to react to COVID. We had moved into a nine thousand square foot facility of our own back in October of 2018, and we spent most of 2019 just trying to settle this kitchen. It was a former egg roll factory; the people that ran it clearly didn't understand building code, electrical code, anything, so we really spent a good year trying to just navigate through the kitchen through most of 2019.

We started 2020 with all these big dreams, everything, then COVID hit and I'll never forget that Friday the 13th, March 13th when Orange County shut down and restaurants shut down.

BS: Was it really Friday the 13th?

BB: Yes it was!

BS: That's funny.

BB: No one talks about that. But it was, it was a Friday the 13th and I remember driving home that night, just in this surreal moment, no one really knew what was lying ahead with this pandemic, at least I certainly didn't. But I sent my staff home and I said we got to decide what we're going to do. Are we going to step up or we going to step back and kind of ride out the storm, if you will, because most of our programs of all the partners we work with just shut down during that week. And everyone came back on Monday morning, it was like God has us here for a reason, we need to step up. So we pivoted and we're still pivoting today, almost a year later. We went from doing about 8,000 meals a week to 8,000 meals a day. I mean it was just amazing.

Fortress by the Salt Sea

We hired 16 unemployed restaurant workers, a lot of our partners and chefs out there that have supported us, they closed down, a lot of people lost jobs.

BS: That's a big part of it, right? Because restaurants, the profit margin for restaurants is already razor thin.

BB: So, so slim, yes.

BS: So then when you get COVID and you can't be open or open and closed, or you can only have a quarter people, it's ridiculous. I mean it's like..

BB: It's been really rough for us.

BS: ..so you were able to recruit a lot of great chefs who had thriving restaurants but just couldn't weather the storm.

BB: Yes, I mean we've had, we still have somewhere in the back a robust volunteer program, but we decided for the safety and everything that needed to happen, we had to postpone that, suspend that, and we hired these cooks and chefs that can really pump out the food and we went from about 20 agency partners to over 70 now. The faith-based community churches have really just stepped up, I mean, churches all over Southern California are feeding people and getting out there, so we just decided to stay in the kitchen, do what we do best and cook food and let somebody else distribute them. We had Betsy, as in the video there, we have another food truck Babs, it's over a year old, hasn't been fired up one time, just waiting for the chance to get back out there and really make a difference.

BS: How many meals did you serve in 2020?

BB: One point seven two four million, almost one point eight million and we planned on doing six hundred thousand that year, so almost three hundred percent increase in what we planned.

BS: Awesome. What's your goal for 2021? Yes, that's great.

BB: Thank you. I tell this story often. We were so excited about 2020. Our strategic plan, this new kitchen we finally settled into. I had a big whiteboard in the back with the plan on it, and when COVID hit, I knew that plan was dead. And it took me months to just erase that whiteboard because all these plans and dreams. But God had other ones and better ones, needless to say.

But because of that, I've been kind of reluctant to put a lot of planning into 2021 because it's so unknown to all the food supply chain, it's been so effective. We certainly want to top our numbers last year, so we're shooting for two million meals this year. And good Lord willing, we'll find a way to do that because the need.. I mean Orange County alone just went from 300,000 people struggling with hunger to over 450,000 people just because people that never had to need a meal or stand in a food line, people just lost their job and out there really hungry now. We know throughout the pages, the Bible, Jesus talks about in dining with the sinners. And at the end of John 21, He talked to Peter about if you love me, feed my lamb, feed my sheep. So we're just trying to..

BS: You're doing it literally.

BB: ..just that and then.

BS: I love it, that's awesome. Well Bill, we thank you so much for what you're doing, and if you're at home or watching online and you want to know more about Bill's Kitchen, you can check it out at brackenskitchen.org. Bill Bracken, thank you so much for what you're doing..

BB: Thank you so much.

BS: ..to serve our community and we're grateful that the kingdom of God is present in your generosity and I think people can learn a lot from your story that very often the blessing often is in those places where we think there isn't any money. A lot of times that's some of the happiest and best places we can be.

BB: Never been happier so praise God for that. Thank you for having me.

BS: Bill Bracken, thank you so much. We love you.

Welcome / Come visit – Bobby Schuller

We're so grateful that you're with us this morning or this evening, wherever you're watching, we just love you and we want you to know we're rooting for you. You know life is hard. God doesn't promise us an easy life, but He does promise to give us the knowledge and the strength we need to endure to victory, and also to come out the other side a stronger person. I just believe whatever you're going through today, if you're going through something, hopefully you're not, but if you are, you'll be grateful in the end that God carried you through, and you'll be grateful for the person that you became through the trial.

Fortress by the Salt Sea

Declaration – Bobby Schuller

Whoever you are, you're loved just the way you are and we want you to stand with us. Hold your hands out like this as a way of receiving from the Lord and we're going to 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. Its 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 "Fortress by the Salt Sea"

I want to tell you a short story that I find really interesting that you might find boring, but I'm going to tell you anyway. Someone I admire greatly, when he passed away, I felt like he might become our generations C.S. Lewis type figure. Dallas Willard, who was a professor of philosophy at USC, but was also a devoted Christian and one of the greatest authors in terms of writing about modern spiritual formation. Just an intellectual genius, but just had a heart full of the Holy Spirit. A wonderful man. And when he was lecturing, I believe on Edmund Husserl, who was a famous German philosopher that Willard had actually translated; he's the world's greatest source on this literature, a student was berating Dr. Willard, and actually said some things I believe about Husserl that were completely erroneous. And then in this diatribe, I guess, Dr. Willard just ended the class and sent everybody away. And one of his colleagues who was present, asked him afterward why did you not, in my words, dunk on that guy. Like why did you not just in front of everybody show everybody how wrong this student was, especially as he was being so rude to you and so obviously arrogant in his presentation of his ideas. And Dr. Willard said "I am practicing the discipline of not having the last word." I am practicing the discipline of not having the last word. Imagine if in the debates that we have today, whether they be political or religious or about what we're going to watch on TV tonight, the important things. Imagine if at the end of those debates we decided not to have the last word. That we decided to trust the word of God that says that the Lord lifts up the humble and lays low the arrogant. The word of God that gives us wisdom that says loving our enemies is the right thing to do. That in fact it's one of the best ways to show that you trust God with your life. Today I want to talk about the importance of not always having the last word. What it means to stand up for yourself, in a way, but also learning that arguing and fighting and elevating things probably doesn't help anything. It just feels good. We need to learn to let God have the last word. Very often when I talk about having the last word, it's hard to know what's the difference in an argument between shoving it down, you know what I mean? If we say okay, I'm going to let them have the last word. Shoving it all down and just seething with resentment for days? Or just letting it go and feeling a sense of freedom? Well, there's a lot we can learn about this. But one of the best analogies I like that was taught from ancient rabbinic Judaism had to do with the two great seas in Israel. If you go to Israel today, you will see two massive bodies of water, and of course in the Middle East and in any desert culture, water is extremely important. It's important everywhere, but in the desert its very, very important. The Sea of Galilee, I still remember the very first time, I was 18 years old, when I woke up early in the morning and saw the sun rising above the Sea of Galilee. This is it behind me here. I remember just thinking all of the history that was there. That's the place where Christ and His disciples were, among many other stories in history, and how important this body of water was to sustain. Huge body of fresh water in the middle of the desert. Even today when you go there, it's incredibly important. There's farms and people and towns all around, and it just feels like a lovely place. Well, the Dead Sea has a river running into it and a river running out of it. It's called the Jordan. And there's something about the water going in and the water going out that keeps the water in the middle fresh. There's another body of water called the Dead Sea, and its aptly named much larger than the Sea of Galilee, on one of the lowest points, maybe the lowest point in the world. I don't know. I knew once. But of course, if you were in the desert and from the distance you saw the Dead Sea, you'd think hooray! There's some water! But if you go in the Dead Sea, its far more salty than the ocean. Nothing can really live in it. You can float in it and its good for your skin. I know we've got a bag of Dead Sea salts in our bath at home, but that's about all its good for. And what the rabbis used to teach was that the Sea of Galilee had water flowing in, and water flowing out. But the Dead Sea only had water flowing in. The rabbis taught that if all we do is sit around and spend our time learning and listening, but never applying the knowledge, we become dead on the inside. We become an illusion. We look like something that can nourish, we look grand, we look like something that people need, but what they'll find within is only death. Of course, the opposite is true – if nothing is flowing in, but only water is flowing out.

Fortress by the Salt Sea

If you've ever been in ministry, you know that leads to the opposite problem – a wadi: a dry, dead riverbed. And neither of those visions is what God wants for us. God wants for us a Sea of Galilee. That we gather in a place like church or we listen to podcasts or we do the things, we take love into our light, we fill up on the inside but then we also have a way in which we show and practice that knowledge. This can be true with knowledge; this could be true of love. And so very often when we talk about having the last word, forgiving our neighbor, we forget that there also has to be this other aspect of our spiritual formation where we're receiving life from the Lord and love from the Lord. Or love from the people in our lives that matter. And I don't know about you, but I have found that if I really focus on my prayer life, and I focus on going deep with the people I love, it also becomes much easier to forgive the guy that cut me off on the 5 freeway. It becomes a lot easier to not reply on Twitter. And it becomes a lot easier even at home when I'm closer in an intimate way with my friends and family, in a way in which we're deep and love each other and vulnerable to one another, it becomes easier to forgive those people. Very often when we say love our enemies, our enemies are our friends; our enemies are our family. In a world in which most of us are not soldiers, we don't have the clear distinction of enemies and allies. Very often the people we love the most are the people we feel the angry at the most. And so, when we work on filling up our own tank, it becomes a lot easier to not have the last word. It becomes a lot easier to lay down the sword. It becomes a lot easier to talk it out and that's what the Lord wants from us. I want to encourage you that if you are in a lot of arguments with people, if you're fighting a lot, sometimes you need to fill up a little bit on the inside. And the second thing is you're completely normal. That all of us argue with our spouses and our friends. All of us get uptight and especially during a season like COVID, everybody's gotten a lot meaner. People are going to be meaner to you and its going to be harder for you to not react and always get mad, so we're going to let it go today. We're going to give it to the Lord and seek life from Him, amen? The scriptures are full of things. The theme of particularly the Old Testament, but really the Bible in general is that God lifts up the humble and lays down the arrogant. It's a recurring theme over and over. Jesus, of course, when He's teaching His disciples, He tells them "he who lives by the sword dies by the sword." Christ, when He was teaching His disciples, who were all young people, by the way. They were all teenagers or college age students, He sought young men and young women full of fire! And I think the Lord liked that. I liked that. I think it's great when people are full of energy and full of passion and want to change the world, and want to make a difference. But very often He could see that some of those kids and young people were being drawn, not to like rabbinic teaching, or not to like many of the good schools that were around, but rather were being drawn to the zealots, which were a group of fanatical Israelites who wanted to, through war, kick the Romans out of Israel. I think Jesus in His teaching could see that this road was a bad one, not only because in and of itself it went against what He taught as the word of God, but also He knew it was fatally flawed against the Roman empire. And He Himself even taught that the temple would be destroyed and that Jerusalem would be taken if they did not turn from the violence that was in their heart. I think so much of being a mentor and a teacher to young people is not telling them to put the fire down, but to use the fire for good, for miracles, for the proclaiming of the kingdom and for helping and loving your neighbor. Well anyway, I think He could see very clearly that the end was coming. We'll get to that in just a minute. But there are grounds in the Old Testament for mercy and kindness to your enemies, for having mercy to people who slander you or put you down, or say bad things about you. One of my favorite stories is the story of David and Saul. David's road was a hard one. Yes, he was probably one of the most famous people in the Bible, but it's interesting because even when Saul, the arrogant, good looking, thriving king is on the throne, David is anointed to be the future king by the prophet, and thus begins this tension where David, after slaying Goliath, becomes Saul's greatest general. He wins all these great victories and Saul begins to go crazy with jealousy. He starts to treat his servant who is incredibly loyal to him, just treat him like garbage, and eventually decides that he's going to kill David. And so David and his friends, they flee into the Judean and Negev wilderness to hide from Saul. And on many occasions, Saul with a band of like 3,000 men is trying to hunt down David and chasing him everywhere, and David has done literally nothing. Isn't it amazing how in life sometimes, when God gives us a word or a vision and we begin that path, you think things are going to become more fun, and it just gets worse. It looks like why did I ever listen to God? Why did I ever begin this adventure? Why did I ever do this thing? But you know that's the way it is in life. When Satan sees that God has an anointing and a call on your life, he'll want to destroy it. So remember, though, God always wins if you don't give up on God. So trust in Him during those times.

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Well anyway, David is running from Saul and hiding in the Judean wilderness and one of these great stories, this is not the first time that Saul has chased after David. Saul and his men, they stop and the king decides to go into a cave to.. what does the Bible say.. relieve himself? Finds a nice, cool shaded private place, and he begins to relieve himself. And little does he know that deeper inside the cave, David and his very tough soldiers were camping in there, and they can see him from the dark relieving himself on the wall. And his allies say to David, the Lord has delivered him into our hands. Strike him down. Take the army. This is clearly from the Lord. But the Bible says that the spirit of the Lord convicted David; that he knew in his heart that even though it looked like this was obviously the Lord delivering His enemies into His hands, that He should have mercy. While Saul is relieving himself, David takes a knife and cuts off a corner of his robe. Saul finishes and walks out of the cave, and David comes out, lays himself before the king, and says look! Look! He had mercy on him. And Saul, in that moment, Saul looks at David and says surely you will become king. God has called you. Look, the Bible shows consistently that God loves to lay down the arrogant, people like Saul, and lift up the humble like David. But even today in our world, we don't see that happening in our leaders, and very often we struggle to apply that ourselves. We see a world of winners and losers. That the winners are made up of the tough and those who are relentless, and the losers are made of those who become the doormats of the tough guys. But the Bible teaches a third alternative. Not that we're doormats or that we let people run over us, but that boldly we are forgiving, boldly we are loving, boldly we say what we believe. Boldly we say the truth but we're willing in the end to listen and not always have the last word. We know that escalating arguments and escalating fighting is only going to cause things to be worse. And this is true in every aspect of the world. You see how a fair civil debate so often just falls into two groups of people, either being deeply offended or two groups of people hating each other. This can happen in your family. How many families broke up over politics the last couple years, or over vaccines, or over masks, or over religion, or many other things. At the end of the day, God is calling you to be different. Don't do what everybody else does. Say what you believe, speak your mind, but be willing to give God the last word. Don't feel like you always have to have your way. Don't feel like you have to always tell it like it is. And don't feel like you have to remain silent. There is a third way. Its Christ' way. It's the way to love our enemies so that as Abraham Lincoln says, "I destroy my enemies by making them my friends." I believe that's possible for you. The battle is the Lord's! That is really a great theme of scripture. And this is what David knew, and this is why he didn't kill Saul, even though he knew very clearly he had every right. Saul was badder, stronger, and yet he had mercy. And this is the kind of mercy and honor that Jesus teaches us to have when dealing with our neighbor. By the way, this place where David was hiding, the Bible calls it the mountain fortress' of the wilderness. Its referring to the great and beautiful deserts of the Judean wilderness and the Negev wilderness. I've been here many times. It's a wonderful place. That's not Arizona, by the way, which is much closer and easier to get to. But it's a beautiful wilderness, and this is exactly where David was hiding. And it's also the location of a very famous spot that I'm going to finish talking about today called the Fortress of Masada. If you were to go on a tour of Israel or parts of Palestine, you'd very likely visit this spot. It's one of the greatest and most impregnable castles that's ever been made. Of course, there's nothing left of it today except the ruins. Masada was built by someone I've talked a lot about who is a very important figure in the New Testament, but is not mentioned often, King Herod the great. Herod, I won't get into his life story, I talked about it over Christmas, but Herod was an Idumean who ascended to the throne of Israel under the Roman Empire. And while he was ruling, he was kind of afraid of this lady to the south named Cleopatra, the last Ptolemaic ruler of Egypt. Now she was a Greek but she did speak Egyptian, but she had the same military prowess that Alexander the Great had, the same types of soldiery and she was a genius, probably. So, Herod was very worried that Cleopatra would come up from Egypt and try to take the southern part of Israel. And so what he did - he was kind of a neurotic guy - he built a string of fortresses, first starting in Jerusalem. There was obviously the Antonia Fortress that was connected to the temple, but there was a number of other buildings that he made that were incredible. They were palace fortress castles. One we talked about not long ago was the Herodian, which was incredible, an incredible castle that overlooked Bethlehem. But this was, if we could bring it up just one more time, this was.. actually, do you have the artist rendering? Here's a rendering of what it would have looked like: a three-tiered palace that was also an incredible castle. It had like swimming pools and even some gardens, and yet it was for sure meant to withstand an incredible onslaught. It's been said by a contemporary, it may not be true, but that the Masada fortress could hold ten thousand soldiers for ten years.

Fortress by the Salt Sea

It had enough water and food supplies to do that. And when you go there, it is just incredibly high. It just feels like cliffs straight down in every direction. So this is what Herod builds, and he builds it for Cleopatra, but little did he know that actually some of his contemporaries would actually take it to fight the Romans. After Jesus dies, even though He's told His disciples and so many people not to fight the Romans, that to live by the sword you die by the sword, this group of Zealots who were this avid religiously militaristic group, begins a revolt in a place called Cesaria. It's a tax revolt and the whole country basically erupts in this giant war to oust the Romans. While they're in Jerusalem, or while they're in Cesaria, this thing erupts and the Romans, of course, come south and they fight against the Jews, and there are many different fights that go on. The Jews get some victories, but of course famously Jerusalem is taken by the Romans and almost everyone.. there's another contemporary, this number is probably not true, said a million people died when Jerusalem was taken. The temple was ransacked, all of the holy stuff was taken to Rome. You can actually see near the Coliseum, there's an Arc to Triumph that has all of the stuff that was taken from the temple, and this is like one of the worst moments in Jewish history. When that happens, there's a small band of leftovers, about 800/900 people who then decide to have their sort of last stand in Masada, but unfortunately they were fighting the Romans and the Romans were just an incredible war-type people. In a famous fight, when Julius Cesar, for example, was attacking Alesia, imagine a town that has I think at the time, thousands of soldiers within it, and walls and all sorts of things, and the Romans decide they're going to attack this town, and the first thing they do is they build a wooden palisade, a wooden wall around the city. And this wall is called a circumvallation. So normally when you build a military wall, it's to keep people out, but this wall was built to keep people in. So they built this wall completely around the city so that when they began attacking it, there was no route of escape. This wall was 18 feet high; it was 20 miles in circumference. The Romans were incredible. And they built this thing in three weeks. And then they built a second wall on.. it's hard to explain. They built a second wall on the outside called a contravallation so that they couldn't be attacked. So it's like a sandwich: two walls like this going around the city and then the Romans camped in the middle part so they couldn't be attacked from the outside, and nobody on the inside could get out. Does that make sense? So the Romans truly were geniuses when it came to engineering and attacking cities. And if there was anyone that was going to be able to take down Masada, it was the Romans. So this is the first thing they did. I think we have a graph of it here. When Masada was assaulted by the Romans, you can see an ariel view. This is the wall. They built this gigantic wall. This one, I think, was two miles in circumference, so that no one could escape once the assault began. Then the height of Masada, I believe, was something like 200-feet up in the air, completely straight up, and they were like how are we going to get up that thing? There's like a very skinny serpentine road that would go up the top. You'd have to go single file. And so what they began to do, it's actually still there, is they began constructing this ramp right here. So what they did is they took a bunch of slaves and they built a giant earthen ramp to go up. And all of this is happening, these zealots are looking down and they know their doom is coming. There's 926 of them, I believe, a third of them are children. And below they see thousands of Roman soldiers, the greatest army the world has ever seen. Eventually that ramp is built, they see a wooden wall surrounding the lower part, they know there's no escape, there's no getting out, and all of a sudden they see this giant siege tower, and a siege tower begins to be rolled up this dirt ramp. The Romans penetrate the outside stone wall, and then there's a small inner wall that's made of wood and earth, and the Romans just begin to set that on fire. And so that wall is lit on fire and now the people who have been holed up in this place for quite a long time, they know the end is nye. There's a leader of their group called Elazar Ben-Yair, and as the wooden walls are burning and they know that they have maybe only a few hours left to live, they know that they and their wives and their children are going to be violated or taken as slaves if they're not killed. And he gives this impassioned zealot type speech: 'remember what they did in Jerusalem? Remember what they did to our temple and to our children? We have one choice left,' this speech he gives. And so they decide, actually, it's a very dark story for a Sunday morning, but they decide they'd take by lot ten of their best killers, of their best soldiers, and every man goes home to his family, they pray together, and then the father kills his children and his wife. Then when all of the women and children are dead, the men then gathered in the middle of town while the walls were burning around them, and the ten guys who were chosen kill the rest of the soldiers in an act of mass suicide. Then the one guy who's the best, kills the other nine, and then took the sword upon himself.

Fortress by the Salt Sea

They took all the food stores and they piled them up, and they took all the weapons and they piled them up so nobody would say that they gave up because they ran out of food or weapons. They wanted people to know that they had the last word. When the Romans got there, everybody was dead. I don't know what to do with this story to teach on it because it's often taught as a hero story, and in many ways its very heroic and very noble, in some ways, that the zealots stood up. And yet also it's hard not to see the tragedy of violence and the way that violence begets violence begets violence. Today when Israeli soldiers take their oaths, they're actually brought to Masada and they make this oath: Masada shall never fall again. It's a lovely sentiment and it's probably a good lesson. Yet at the end of it all, especially as Americans, we are prone to fighting, standing up for ourselves, standing up for what's right. Jesus never tells us not to stand up for what's right. But He tells us a way in which to stand up for what is right. There is a way in the kingdom of God in which the powerless have power. And some, sometimes in history that descriptor is violence. For us it's not. For us the way that we have power is by saying what is true but doing so with kindness in our hearts. Saying what is true but not with arrogance but humility. And most of all, not being the kind of people that always have to have the last word. The lesson we learn from Masada was that none of that had to happen, and that's what I believe, although you never want to speak ill of the dead. You love their heart for God, you love their passion, and yet you think did it all have to happen that way? In the end, we are people who love our enemies and we are people who let God have the last word, amen? So what happens when your enemy is a person you love the most? What happens when your enemies are your kids or your parents or your spouse or your best friend or your colleague at work? See I think that is the real issue. If I were to ask most of the people in here: who is your enemy? Most people would say I don't really have an enemy, except for that guy that always takes my parking spot. I have not slashed his tires or broken his window. No, really, when we feel the sense of enemy, very often it's the people we love the most. And that's why it's so important that those relationships don't get, in a way, violent. That they don't escalate in the same way that the zealots escalated the thing with the Romans. That we learn that God has a better way. Like if you used to love your spouse, you can love them again. If you used to have a great friendship, if you used to be close to your family members, you can be there again. But it's not the way that the world teaches. It's a way of humility; of listening, of loving, of saying what you believe, saying what you know, not just shoving it down, but also trusting that there is a better way. And so I just believe that for you. Believe that God's doing a good work in you. In all your arguments, whether you argue about politics or religion or about what's for dinner, I just believe that you can do it better, and we're going to trust that the Lord is going to see you through that. And I just believe in you. So Father, we thank you so much that you teach us a better way. We pray, God, we could learn from history and from our own past that when we escalate things and we turn the temperature up, it doesn't make things better. Father, help us to be at peace with our neighbor. Help us to continually forgive others, and Lord we love you, it's in Jesus' name we pray, amen.

BENEDICTION – Bobby Schuller

Thank you all so much for being here today, whether you're here in the sanctuary or out on the courtyard or watching online, we're so glad you joined us. And it's always great when you incorporate church and a church community into the rhythm of your life. It's like going to the gym – the more you do it, the buffer you get, so we're praying that that happens for you. 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 peace in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, amen.