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WELCOME – Bobby & Hannah Schuller

BS: This is the day the Lord has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it. Good morning.

HS: Hello church family. It feels so good to be with you. Thank you for being here. And a special welcome to our first time visitors; we're so happy to have you. There is an old Jewish proverb that says a little bit of light pushes away a lot of darkness. Your kindness makes a difference. Thank you so much for being here. We love you.

BS: That's a good line.

HS: Thank you.

BS: I said that at the other service. It's really nice. Well we really are so glad you're here, and we're going to believe that you can be that little light in your world; that wherever you go, you bring the light of Christ everywhere with you and it makes a big difference. Lord, we thank you that you've called us all here. Thank you that we're your people and we ask, Father, for your Holy Spirit to move in an awesome and profound way in our lives. Lord, we have faith in you, we trust you, and we love you, it's in Jesus' name we pray, amen.

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

SCRIPTURE – Matthew 16,24-27 - Hannah Schuller

In preparation for the message, Matthew 16:24:

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done."

Amen.

INTERVIEW – Lisa Bevere (LB) and Bobby Schuller (BS)

Lisa Bevere is an author, speaker and co-founder of Messenger International, a ministry that impacts millions of people around the world. She also speaks to women on finding their identity in Christ. "I really believe that we can write our way into our future." Her new book, *Be Angry, But Don't Blow It*, looks at how we can use scripture and prayer to help convey our negative emotions.

BS: Lisa, hi!

LB: So thrilled to be here.

BS: We're so glad to have you. It's been awhile. This is the first time you've been in our new church in Irvine so welcome, we're glad to have you back.

LB: It's beautiful.

BS: And we just love so much what you and John have been doing in your ministry at Messengers International, and tell us how's that going, how's ministry going?

LB: Well it's great because it's become multi-generational and we've hit a landmark of giving away thirty million resources in a hundred and eleven languages to people who cannot get it because of persecution or poverty, so we're super excited about that.

Crossing the Finish Line

BS: Wow, that's awesome, powerful and congratulations on a milestone. I still remember when my sister Angie and I were at Oral Roberts University how big of an impact that you and John had on so many of the students there who were just sort of beginning life, who were looking for spiritual parents and you were that way to us, and I know you continue to do that. And it's so great to see God sort of ten Xing your ministry over these last few years and seeing the reach you're having. So congratulations.

LB: Thank you. Oh, we love it.

BS: Well I'm really excited about this book. It's an awesome book called Be Angry, But Don't Blow It.

LB: Yes.

BS: And tell us a little bit about how this book came to be?

LB: Well I am half Sicilian, so I have been angry and blown it.

BS: Yes.

LB: So I write the books I need to read. The thing is God gives us permission to be angry, but not to be destructive with our anger. The Bible's very clear. It says the wrath of man or woman does not produce the righteous purposes of God. And right now we have a lot of people they're very angry and have a lot of opportunity to say things. And so we've got so much offense, so much anger, so much un-forgiveness out there. And so I want people to understand it's okay to be upset, it's not okay to be destructive. God gets angry. And so what happens when God gets angry, He says He turns away so we can turn back. So sometimes I look at my husband and I say I'm going to have to act like God right now. I'm going to turn away from you so that I can turn back to you.

BS: Do you and your husband ever fight?

LB: Yes. I am half Sicilian, he is 75% Italian and then he's Dutch. We don't have a chance not to fight.

BS: Yes, yes, yes. That's great.

LB: Super intense people.

BS: But that's an important part of marriage, isn't it? I mean married people who love each other are going to have conflict.

LB: See I used to speak to my husband like he was an enemy and God said you're not enemies – you're intimate allies. And allies do not attack one another's weaknesses. Allies speak to one another's strength. So I had to think am I talking to my husband the way he needs to hear from me? Because the truth is if you want to be heard, you have to say things the way you would want to hear it. I don't like it when people threaten me, I don't like it when people judge me, I don't like it when people yell at me. I was talking to my husband that way, and so he wasn't hearing me, I was just triggering him. And so when I shifted it and began to speak to him the way I like to be spoken to, everything began to change.

BS: For you, it was moving from fighting against my husband to fighting with my husband.

LB: Absolutely.

BS: And I think that's the shift that people miss. It's not about not fighting, it's about fighting together vs. fighting each other.

LB: Fighting for is the biggest thing and..

BS: That's important to you as a Sicilian.

LB: Yes it is. Yes. Family. It's all about the family, yes.

BS: That was a joke, but in truth, all of us..

LB: I got it. I got it.

BS: ..all of us, it's so important that when we're fighting FOR something it's a part of feeling alive in our relationships and when you're fighting FOR your marriage, fighting FOR your family, fighting FOR your faith or the things that matter for you, then it draws you closer to people, doesn't it.

LB: And if you suppress what is viable anger, then what happens is it comes out in a destructive way. And too many people don't know how to navigate it.

Crossing the Finish Line

Every couple, every family needs tools so that they can build. John and I, we, again, Italian, Sicilian, made a lot of mistakes in front of our children. And we would be at the table and we'd be like excuse us a moment, we're going to step out of the room. We would go out of the room, we'd have a little discussion, I'd come back in, I'd say do you remember how I just talked to your dad? That was disrespectful. And my boys would say, yes, we knew that. But we're glad you know that. And then my husband would say you know how I just talked to your mom? That was really harsh, that was wrong. And they were like we knew that, too. So we weren't perfect parents, but we did it well. And being angry and not blowing it is about building something that is healthy. Taking this and saying I'm going to do it better all the time. And so it's a habit. Anger can become a.. destructive anger can be habit and constructive anger can become a habit.

BS: And it's an important part of discipleship. It's something we need to do well. I really want to encourage you to get this book – Be Angry, But Don't Blow It: Maintaining your passion without losing your cool. Lisa, thank you so much for this awesome book.

LB: Absolutely.

BS: And for being here, we appreciate you.

LB: It's a privilege. Thank you so much.

BS: God bless you, God bless you.

DECLARATION – Bobby Schuller

For those of you who are at home, and those of you who are in the church, would you hold your hands out like this as a way of receiving from the Lord, 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. Thanks, you can be seated.

MESSAGE – Bobby Schuller "The Cross of Change"

Today we're beginning a new series called Take Up Your Cross and follow me. Now in our day, taking up a cross is probably quite a bit different than it was in Jesus' day. In His day and age of martyrdom, taking up your cross literally meant being crucified. But in our day, especially in the United States or if you live in an industrialized country, a democracy, you're probably not going to face any real punishment in that way for your faith. But there are other crosses that we bear as Christians that are easy to neglect. And so during this.. we're well into the Lenten season now, during this season kind of building up to Easter, I want to do my best to remind us that there is a cross to bear in something like loving your enemies. There's a cross to bear in generosity. Mercy is a cross. Humility is a cross. Not getting credit for things is a cross. That there are these ways that Jesus teaches us to live our life, but that on the other side of that crucifixion is resurrection. That there's a great reward for that, and I don't just mean going to heaven or gold when you get to heaven or something like that. I mean that it leads to the kind of life that is just overflowing with joy, overflowing with joy. And so we're going to talk about that going on. But first, we have to understand how horrible, ugly, repulsive and disgusting the image of the cross was and is. That the cross today is actually amazing that Christians and Christ Himself took the image of the cross and by what He accomplished on that cross turned it into something beautiful, the most recognized religious symbol in the world today. But it wasn't that way in the first century. Author Tom Holland talks about the first heated pool that was built on the Esquiline Hill just outside the city of ancient Rome. It was about three or four decades before the birth of Christ, and nobody knew that someday this terrible place would be one of the richest, most beautiful places in Rome. Here behind me you can see one of those famous baths. Before the buildings were built there outside the Esquiline gate, there was a place called the Sensorium where people were crucified and not just any people. Romans didn't execute thieves or murderers with crucifixion.

Crucifixion was reserved for one type of person and one type of person alone – a rebellious slave. It was during these times in the Sensorium that you might see children, women, old people dying over periods of days, being kept alive to be tortured to death in this horrible way by the Roman Empire. You see, the Roman Empire grew through warfare and when Rome or some Roman general conquered some region, if he didn't kill everybody that was there, he would bring back with him all the spoils of war. Would be gold and silver and manuscripts and tapestries, but especially slaves. And when they did a triumphal march into the city of Rome, you would see all of the booty, all the loot, right, but then you would also see a long line usually of thousands of men, women and children from whatever region they conquered that would become somebody's servants in perpetuity. Some of them gladiators, some of them doing other things that are inappropriate to talk about in church. And sometimes these slaves would rebel against their masters, and when that happened, they were put on display, not killed even in a humane way, as if there were such a thing, but they would crucify them. Crucifixion meant that the person was either nailed or tied to a cross. There are many ways that they would do it. Sometimes they would hang their arms over the top part of the T of the cross, sometimes they would hang them sideways like so. When a young woman was crucified, very often she would be crucified facing the cross with her back towards the audience, as order to not create any more trouble than there needed to be. Before they were crucified, the victim would be stripped of all of their clothing, including their underwear so the private parts and everything would be showing. They would be beaten almost to the point of shock, whipped and hung, and then put on display on a main road so everyone could see this is what happens to slaves when they rebel against their masters. One of the most famous crucifixions was at the end of the Third Servile War ended by Crassus' and Pompey, two evil generals from Rome. You might recognize the name Spartacus, who led the great revolt against Rome, but when they lost in a final battle, six thousand slaves were crucified on the road into the city. There was another rule about slaves that if one slave under the lording of a master, killed the master that all of the slaves were then put to death. So if you had ten slaves and one of those slaves killed you, the other nine would be crucified, as well. In one famous case of the senator named Secundus, he had four hundred slaves, and one of his slaves killed him, and they tried to stop the killing of the other slaves because most of the other slaves were women and children, but a law is a law, and they were all crucified. Can you imagine seeing a crucified child? Can you imagine crucifying a little kid? This is Rome, Rome is evil. Even graded on a curve, I don't know why we romanticize Rome. That's not a pun, by the way. Rome was so horrible. And it would be there that after the men, women or children were tortured for days on end, that finally when they died, they left them hanging for even more days to allow the birds to eat their flesh away. When that was done, undertakers who were dressed in red wearing bells, would take those people off of the cross, and then would carry them to open graves where they would be left and the stench would reach the Esquiline gate for a long time. Nothing happened there. Eventually there would be guardians and palaces and things built on this hill. Do we have a picture of it? But they would be buried on top of the bodies of thousands of innocent people. And actually, this ends up being a literary device in a lot of western literature, the Esquiline Hill. That's neither here nor there. My point in saying this – what a great way to start a sermon, just so bright and cheery. Why am I just talking about this? The reason is that eventually this mode of execution makes its way to Israel. And those who are in Israel some of them zealots, some of them by this time the practice becomes that any insurrectionist, that is any rebel, anyone who was a part of conquered Rome, if they try and rise up, well they get crucified, as well. And by Jesus' day, you have seen many of your friends, usually young men crucified on the road into Jerusalem, or crucified into Caesarea, or one of the towns that you lived in. When Jesus says take up your cross and follow me, He's talking about a very ugly instrument.

He's talking about the worst, the worst way anyone could imagine in those days dying, and something that probably most people had witnessed. In fact, they wanted everybody to see it. That was the point. The great thing, though, about the cross is that the cross is the thing that comes before the resurrection. And that with such a great price also comes such a great reward. And maybe many of you right now today, you're watching, and you are going through a cross. You're going through a horrible time in your life, and you don't know how you're going to get through, but remember we don't serve a Christ who is still on the cross, we serve a Christ who is raised from the dead. And when we follow Him to the cross, we also follow Him to the resurrection. He won't let you go to the grave with Him without raising you from the dead. Wherever He goes, we go. Yes, He goes to the grave we go with Him, but when He rises, we rise with Him, and I want you to know you're going to get through whatever you're going through. You are going to get through what you're going through. You and Christ together, I promise you. And that brings us to Matthew chapter 16. We talked about this two months ago about His brief visit to Caesarea Philippi where the famous line "take up your cross and follow me" is uttered, but it's uttered in a crazy context. Remember, Jesus has His disciples, and most of these disciples are young very conservative Jewish teens or guys in their 20's. Picture some of like most conservative, Evangelical Christians from the Midwest, something like that. This is what Jesus' disciples are like. They come from very tight knit families with rules and small communities, many of them are farmers and they're at odds with this bizarre Roman world that they live in. Jesus takes these 12 disciples from the area of Galilee; He takes them up to a region called Caesarea Philippi. Now it's an 18-mile hike, and I guarantee you all of those boys knew exactly what was in Caesarea Philippi, and for sure their dads would not have been stoked if they knew they were going there. It'd be like if you took a bunch of kids from a Christian camp, and you're like okay, let's go to a strip club in Las Vegas. These kids know what Caesarea Philippi is. It is the Vatican for Pan worship. Pan is one of the key gods in the Greek Pantheon. He's half goat, half man, god of fertility, and all of the other stuff that goes with that. And there was regular worship in Caesarea Philippi. The whole space was just effectively a worship center for the god Pan. If you go to Israel, you can see this today that there's two spots that are very famous. One is called the Gates of Hades, and the other is called The Rock of the Gods, okay? So this image here on the left, this is the Rock of the Gods where all of the Pagan statues were. The biggest one was set aside for the idol Pan. And this area on the right, which is just actually to the left of this, you almost want to switch them, this is called the Gates of Hades. Hades is a dark, damp, shadowy place of the dead where Pan resigns during winter, but when spring comes, he comes out of his cave and he fertilizes the farms. Yes, it's exactly what you're thinking if you're thinking it. That is how they thought of the universe in this way. And so they would have this giant thing all the time. They would have these celebrations where men and women, priest and priestesses and witnesses would come and gather with goats and they would take all of their clothing off in this evening celebration with smoke, and fire, and kind of dark music, and the goats, and the men, and the women would all commit immorality with each other out and about hundreds of people, and it would create such a rise, such a scream, such a holler and a screech that they called this pandemonium. That's where we get the word pan, for the god Pan, demonium. Pan later, by the way, means many or all things. That's because of the many faces of Pan, so the way that the language develops, we already talked about this two months ago, so I won't get too deep into it, but it becomes this awful, horrible display, and this is where Jesus takes His disciples. Imagine them standing on a hill, and they're seeing all of this, and one of Jesus' disciples is like oh, ah gavel, if my dad knew I was here, I'd be in huge trouble. There are these Jewish boys that are all about cleanliness. I mean, they're not allowed to break rules about having two types of cloth in your garment! And here they're seeing this. The world they live in. As this is going on, they're standing there and it's like Jesus doesn't even say anything yet. He looks at His disciples and He says "who do people say I am?"

Crossing the Finish Line

And they were like with one eye they don't want to look, and the other eye they do want to look, and then they look at Jesus. And Peter being the oldest has to respond. And he looks at Jesus and he says, well some people say you're John the Baptist come back. And some people say you're Elijah, and other people think you're Jeremiah. And Jesus looks at him and says: "who do you say I am?" And with boldness, Peter says you're the Messiah, the Son of the living God. And then Jesus says this phrase that is the greatest compliment any rabbi can give to a disciple. It was a very common thing to say, and it's when they give the best answer they could possibly give, he says "blessed are you Simon, son of John, son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood but by your Father in heaven." And then He adds this bit: "And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it." By the way, Protestants and Catholics love to argue over what this rock means. What if the Catholics and the Protestants are right, but then there's a third option. Can we bring that slide back up where you have literally He's looking at the Rock of the Gods, and the Gates of Hades. I mean they're looking at it as He says this. Maybe it's on this rock that He will build my church. In other words, I want you to go into the world and build my church here amongst the people who are with the goats, who are in the dirt, who are in the mud, who are clearly reaching for something in their lives. You need to help these people – they need you. What if that's what it means? And what if those gates where Pan comes out of will not prevail against the work you're going to do in this place? And He says to Peter, "I'll give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven; whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." And so it's this great compliment. And then Jesus looks at them and He says, I need to tell you guys something else. I'm going to go to Jerusalem very soon, and the chief priests and the teachers of the law are going to put me to death. But on the third day, I will be raised to life. Do you remember who speaks again? It's Peter, again. But what does Peter say? Never, Lord. May this thing never happen to you. That seems like a very caring thing to say, doesn't it. It's like a mother who says to a soldier that wants to enlist in the army during a war time, don't do it. Be safe. Stay at home, right? It seems like a caring thing. What does Jesus say? "Get behind me, Satan. Get behind me, Satan. You are a stumbling rock to me!" Notice how He goes from the rock on which He will build His church, to a stumbling rock. "For you do not have in mind the concerns of God but merely human concerns." Why does Jesus say this? Well I know you've heard me say this a million times, but just a brief review, a disciple is not just a follower or student. A Talmud in Hebrew is this person who when a rabbi comes to them and says "follow me" and they accept they are essentially enrolling in the idea that they're going to do everything the rabbi does. So, everything Jesus does, Peter does. When Jesus walks left, what does Peter do? Walks to the left. When Jesus gets on a boat, what does Peter do? Peter gets on a boat. When Jesus throws His net, what does Peter do? He throws his net. When Jesus heals somebody, what does Peter do? Say it. He heals somebody. When Jesus walks on water, when Jesus walks on water, what does Peter do? He walks on water. You do what your rabbi does. When Jesus goes to Jerusalem, what does Peter have to do? When Jesus dies on the cross, what does Peter have to do? See when Peter says this, I think it's feigned concern for Jesus, but it's really concern for himself and this is revealed in the fact that not that long after this, he's going to deny Christ three times. In response to this, when he says never Lord, don't go to Jerusalem, Jesus says get behind me, Satan. You don't care about the things of God, you only care about your life, you only care about the world. And then Mark says that He turns to the whole crowd. What crowd? The pandemonium. And in a loud voice, shouts to everyone, including His disciples: "Whoever" this is a rabbi, right? Full of passion! This is not weird, this is how rabbis are. This is why people follow Him, full of passion, full of fight, full of vinegar. "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross" and there's the word, "and follow me." Do what I do. "For whoever wants to save their life will lose it! But whoever loses their life for me will find it. What good will it be if you gain the whole world but forfeit your soul?"

Or what could anyone give in exchange for their soul!" And you can almost picture Jesus' voice echoing off of the wall of the Rock of the Gods, and echoing off of the Gates of Hades, and piercing the hearts of people as God in flesh calls them all to mass repentance and to the cross. Did they stop and look? Maybe, I don't know. I don't think Jesus screaming at an audience is an easy thing to ignore. When Jesus is screaming this in front of Peter, who said never Lord, never, He says that anyone who goes to the cross in this way will not fail to inherit a great reward. See don't forget this last thing – if Jesus goes to the cross, what does Peter do? Say it. Come on, say it! If Jesus is raised from the dead, what does Peter do? See. Being with Christ is always the best place to be. But if you want to follow Christ to heaven, first you have to follow Him to the grave. And this is the bizarre dichotomy of what it means to be Christian; of what it means to be a follower of Christ. Yes, we want the reward of full, rich life of joy, of happiness, of love, of heaven, of a great church, of a great community, but there's also a great cost. And that cost, by the way, is a big cost, but it's different for everybody. And I want you to know that if you pay that price, you will receive that reward. Is it bad to want a reward, by the way? I remember I had a friend who was trying to help people and she felt bad that the only reason I want to do this is because I kind of want a reward from it. And I said that's great! When you read the Sermon the Mount, Jesus does say try not to keep the left hand from knowing what the right hand is doing, but He also talks about like if you want a reward from God, the word reward is one of the biggest words that is used in Jesus' sermons. The reason we follow Jesus to the cross is not just to do what's moralistically right, or because we should or because it's our duty, but because there's this great reward. Resurrection, glory, full life, and it's worth it. Jesus is our brother, God is our Father. He wants the best for us. He's not angry at you, He doesn't want you to suffer, He doesn't want bad for your life, He wants you to live a life full of joy! But joy comes with a cost. Comes with a cost. And I'll just finish with this. One of the greatest costs, one of the greatest crosses that we bear as Christians is actually this first cross, and that's the cross of change. That as we change, or as things change around us and we don't change with it, there is this social cost to loving the Lord with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind and all your strength. There is always, always, always going to be a social cost of discipleship. If you have not experienced a social cost in your discipleship, it might be that something's wrong. Remember what Jesus said: blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you, why? Because that's what they did to the prophets. It means you're doing something right. But cursed are you when everybody only says good stuff about you all the time, it's all good stuff, why? Because that's what they said about the false prophets. It's that joke I say like if you don't have an enemy, get one. And I mean that sort of literally and sort of joking, but when we are living for something that matters to us, it's going to make some people a little uncomfortable, and that's okay. That's a part of being free in the kingdom of God. Okay, so I think if there is this social cost of discipleship that sometimes we have these experiences and changes in life that are hard, but one of the biggest ones are these sort of growing apart that happens, especially as we're full of joy and full of life. Maybe you've experienced that before. I remember when I was in high school, I was 16-years-old, and I had this group of friends and we played basketball together all the time, and they were not bad kids, they weren't great kids, but we were all just a bunch of dudes playing basketball after school every day, and these are my only friends. I was living in a new place, and this is all I had, and these were nice guys. But we used a lot of language, and we talked about dumb stuff all the time, and I remember, I had this radical miracle experience and conversion experience where after that, I kept hanging out with these guys, but I could just sort of slowly feel us growing apart. I didn't think their jokes were funny anymore. I liked basketball, but the company was.. it's like it didn't feel right. And over time, I'm not judging them, they weren't bad, and I wasn't like some righteous thing, but just something was happening in my life that made it where it didn't fit anymore.

And eventually there was a season where I stopped playing basketball with them. We stayed acquaintances and friends and it was all good, but I just had this season of loneliness where I had no friends, and I wanted the Lord with all my heart, but I also felt this loneliness. And the temptation sometimes is to go back to those old groups maybe where you don't belong and you don't fit because you feel lonely. Don't do that if that's you right now, by the way. Very often in those seasons, God's preparing your life for new friends that are going to get you to the place you need to go to get you to your destiny, and its going to be so full of joy, so full of resurrection life and power. And actually in this case after months of loneliness, I eventually found a youth group called One Eighty, where I would meet a number of friends, but one of the closest ones was a guy named Chris Presley, who is the older brother to Hannah Presley, who is now named Hannah Schuller. Hi, Hannah! My wife. In fact I'm going to see Chris Presley later today. We're going to be playing cards. And I think about how God prepared my heart for that friendship and for my friendship with Hannah that 30 years later is going on full of life and full of joy. And that's why Jesus says, disciples from John the Baptist come to Jesus and they say rabbi, because John the Baptist was very stern. He was an Essene, they're kind of like monks and they're very like strict. And so His disciples come to Jesus and they say rabbi, how come your disciples don't fast? And Jesus looks at them and the Greek says because they're stoked. They're happy people! It's the most obvious answer ever. He says to them when you're with the bridegroom at the wedding, you don't fast. They're happy! And then He says you don't take new cloth and put it on an old garment, because when you wash it, it'll tear the cloth. And you don't take new wine.. okay wine is just a rich awesome symbol in Judaism, and it should be for Christianity. You don't take new wine and put it in an old wine skin, or else what? The wine skin will burst! This is California, we are wine country. Temecula, Sonoma, Napa my sister lives in Paso Robles, and Israel looks just like California. Israel, like Italy, is wine country. It's full of vines and vineyards and good cheeses and good wines and good bread and good farms. Many people here make their own wine, very, very common, and you might see this if you walk into a house in wine country – wine carboys full of new wine. Wine carboys are these five gallon glass things that are full of sugary wine, and what's happening is that sugar is fermenting into ethanol alcohol, and the gas is released, and so you have these airlocks on top that go up. And as the wine ferments, it begins to swirl. If you ever see it on like day three or four, it actually gets a little warm, and you'll see the thing swirling like a whirlpool like its alive, but there's nothing on the side. It's really a cool thing to see. And eventually that wine will go and be put into barrels and stuff. But it's funny because wine makers here have accidentally put new wine into glass bottles. They'll put wine that hasn't totally fermented through because they were in a hurry or they just didn't wait long enough, and they put them in these glass bottles, and then they might put them above their, fridge or in a closet or something, and at two in the morning, all of a sudden they hear what they think is a gunshot – pop! Pop! Pop! Pop! Pop! And they try and figure out, and then they go in and there is what they think is blood all over the kitchen counter, and what is it? Its wine bottles that weren't done fermenting. They explode and they pop the wine bottles. This happened all the time in Jesus' day. People put new wine into an old wineskin and it pops. Wine is universally, but especially in Israel, keep in mind we're not trying to convince to you drink more, okay? This is a symbol. But wine is universally a symbol for joy, celebration, friendship. Right? Wine. This is people gathering together, enjoying a wedding, enjoying something good in their life. That's what wine means. And maybe in your life, you're full of joy and people don't like it. Maybe as you change, your joy doesn't fit with others. I think we're living in a society that.. this is so bizarre, but people are becoming less and less okay with others being happy. I don't know what the deal is. But when you see somebody publicly happy, a lot of people think one of two things. Either number one: they're immoral. They're doing something wrong, or what they're doing is evil, or they're stealing, or whatever, right? So there's envy. They're immoral. They got to be doing something wrong. Or number two: they're stupid. They're just happy because they're stupid.

Crossing the Finish Line

So it's like there's this rejection of happiness associative with either stupidity or immorality. But that's not true. That's not true at all. Actually, I believe that the happiest life you can live is a godly life, full of joy, when you're doing it the right way. Not legalism or religious stuff, but just knowing the Lord and doing what is right, walking the right path. That that's the joyful life. Doing it with the right kind of people. And one of the best compliments I ever got. I wasn't always a super happy person. There were times when I was dark and sullen, and there were some years where I was kind of scrappy and fighting. I was talking to Lisa about that earlier. And I had a good friend of mine that I think he meant it as a tongue in cheek, but he said Bobby Schuller just oozes with joy. I thought that was a nice compliment. I think it meant as a joke, but I took it.. there's truth in every jest. I hope I ooze with joy, and I hope you ooze with joy, too. Remember that Jesus' first miracle was that He turned water into wine at the end of a wedding. You remember what the host said to Him? One – this is amazing wine. This is like the best wine I've ever had in my life. He says to Jesus, normally people.. or maybe Jesus says it, I can't remember. But no, he says to Jesus, normally you serve the best wine at the beginning, and then when everybody gets drunk, you bring out all the cheap stuff. But he says, but no, you have saved the best for last. Keep in mind, we're not encouraging you to get drunk or drink, but the symbol you have saved the best for last, that's the kind of God we serve. I think the enemy frontloads the good stuff and backloads the bad stuff, but God frontloads the cross and backloads the resurrection. Right now, maybe you're going through difficulties in your work or marriage or family, I want you to know we serve the kind of God who saves the best for last, amen? You're going to get through whatever it is you're going through. I'm proud of you, I'm on your side, and I'm so excited to see what God's going to do in your life when you reach the finish line. Lord we love you, and we thank you for your joy. Thank you that not all change is a bad change, and I pray that you'd give us all a willingness to bear our cross so that we can also experience your resurrection. We pray all these things in Jesus' name, amen.

BENEDICTION:

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.