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GOOD MORNING – Bobby & Hannah

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

HS: Welcome visitors and church family. It is always a joy to be with you. You know, it is not sacrilegious to believe in yourself like God believes in you. See yourself like God sees you. You are His presence here. You are His masterpiece, and you are loved.

BS: If you've never been before, welcome, we're so glad you're here. Would you join us for a word of prayer? Father, we thank you so much that your Holy Spirit is here with us, and we ask in Jesus' name for an outpouring of your spirit. Help us, Lord, to soften our hearts to the good things you have in store for us. Lord, we love you and we thank you. It's in Jesus' name we pray, amen.

HS: Amen.

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

SCRIPTURE – Matthew 21:4-11 - Hannah

In preparation for the message, Matthew 21:4-11.

This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: "Say to Daughter Zion, 'See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'" The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Hosanna in the highest heaven!" When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, "Who is this?" The crowds answered, "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee."

Amen.

BOBBY SCHULLER THANK YOU TO ERIN CHOI & VOICES OF HOPE

Thank you Erin Choi! What a gift you have. We appreciate you so much and thank you to the children for leading us in worship today. What a gift that is.

WELCOME/COME VISIT – Bobby Schuller

This is a church that loves people right where they are. We submit our lives to the word of God and we always want to grow as people, but I know sometimes if you're newish to a church, you don't know if you're like doing the right thing, if you should stand or sit or snap your fingers instead of applause. None of those things apply here. Just be you; be a nice person. You don't even have to be a nice person, just don't be a mean person and you'll do fine.

DECLARATION – Bobby Schuller

Would you stand with us? We're going to say this creed together as we do every week. Hold your hands out like this as a way of receiving from the Lord. Let's say this together: I'm not what I do. I'm not what I have. I'm not what people say about me. I am the beloved of God. It's who I am. No one can take it from me. I don't have to worry, I don't have to hurry, I can trust my friend Jesus and share His love with the world.

MESSAGE – Bobby Schuller "Save Us Lord! No, Not Like That!"

It's interesting how our view of God is often similar to the way that pagan peoples of the past viewed God. Voltaire said something like.. oh, everybody got a worried look on their face. Did the electric go out? At least my mic's on! It's fine. Voltaire said something like we made God in our own image. I think it was Voltaire.

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The idea was that we think God is as mean spirited, vindictive, against us, angry. Everybody looks super distracted. Is there something weird going on? What is going on? What was happening! Can somebody tell me? The screen went off? Oh it went back on. All right, we're fine. I don't care. Who cares. Right here, everybody. I had a teacher that use to do that. Right here. In life, we want to impress on God all of these things that we wrestle with when we know people. And the truth is, and this is all I want you to hear: God has the best in store for you. God is so, so for you. Maybe there was a time when you're like well what about the time when this hard thing or that hard thing happened. There are some things in life, like if you have a coach or something. I remember hating my coaches, and I had a great coach once who's name unfortunately, and this is his real name, Mr. Legaus. That was his name. That's not a joke. But he was an awesome coach. But he'd make us do hard things. Sometimes when you're in the middle of God challenging you to improve as a person, you can feel resentful or angry or these types of things, I just want you to know we can trust God with our lives, and we can know that everything He's doing in your life is for your benefit. Why do so many Christians get these alarm bells that go off when you say God's doing something good in your life for your benefit. You are His child. He'd be a bad father if what He was doing in your life was for your harm, would He not? Be abusive father, is that who He is? I think not. God is a loving, perfect Father. He's got you in His sights, and the Bible and the gospel, the good news, the good news is that God is for us and not against us because Christ was crucified and raised from the dead. And we can just trust that. We can trust that. Today, I want to talk to you about the importance of softening your heart. God has joy in store for you. God has better relationships and friendships. God doesn't want you to lead a lonely, isolated life. God doesn't want you to lead a secret life that you're ashamed of. He doesn't want you to pretend. He doesn't want you to be crippled by sadness or mourning. God has a good life in store for you, but to receive the life that He has for you, first you have to soften your heart. Many of us have found that the only way to deal with life is to harden our hearts; to power up; to tell it like it is; to be on the outside, at least, tough all the time. This is something I've struggled with in my life and many of you have, as well. And today I want to encourage you soften your heart. Soften your heart to God. Soften your heart to your friends and your co-workers. If you're married, soften your heart to your spouse or to your kids or even your parents. A lot of us have hard hearts to our parents. God has good in store for you, but our hearts have to be softened. In the gospels, Jesus tells a parable about these seeds. I've gotten into urban gardening. I'm really excited about it. And what I mean by "I've gotten into it" means I've watched a lot of YouTube videos and I've been asking Hannah for permission to do things, and I've literally done nothing. But I'm going to. I'm going to. In fact, I'm going to go to Lowe's tonight, I'm pretty sure. But I'm going to start with strawberries. But I've been watching everything. My final goal expert level is going to be when I have chickens. I'm going to get three. The city of Costa Mesa allows you to have five, but I'm just going to start with three. But anyway, one of the videos I was watching was on how to grow grain, and it made me think about this passage. You can grow wheat in your backyard. In California, it'd grow really well. You kind of just water it a couple times and it'll pretty much grow on its own. I noticed that big farmers, and even farmers in Jesus' day, when you have a lot of land, the way you would do it is you would walk through a path, you would prepare the soil and then you'd do what's called broadcasting the seed, and that's just when you kind of go like this, half hazard. And this is the parable Jesus uses. He says the farmer went out; he'd be sowing his seed, throwing his seed out into the field. And let me work this backwards. I'm going to do it the opposite direction that Jesus did. The last one He said was some fell on good seed, and it had a great harvest. Another said that it grew up, but it was choked out by the worries and riches of life. That's the thorns. Another one said it sprung up on the rock, but it had no roots and it died in the sun. But there's the other one that we almost always ignore, and for me, every time I read this passage, it stands out to me in a particular way. And He says it's the seed that falls on the path. The seed that falls on the path. Now if you go to a farm, you'll recognize that the path usually isn't made. It kind of just appears out of nowhere, almost randomly. Sometimes it happens because that's the one that the dog walks on a lot, but eventually the path is just the place where the farmer walks. It's the place that gets walked on. That's the hardened soil. And that's the soil that never receives the word of God. It just can't even hear it. It never receives a blessing, it never gets any weeds, but it never gets any wheat, either. Just gets nothing. To me, this is a beautiful picture of what has happened to so many. Maybe this is a picture of what happened to you. Maybe as a kid you got walked on a lot. Maybe you got walked on by religious people. Maybe you had a pastor, or a religious sibling or parent. Maybe your ex-spouse was super religious and used it to hurt you, manipulate you.

God is Doing a New Thing

But no matter what, you felt walked on, walked on, walked on. And eventually you just went no, no more. No more. And this hardened heart appeared inside of you. It's not something you cherish, it's not something you like about yourself, necessarily, but it's something that helps you endure and stay safe from being walked on. You say I will not be walked on ever again and your heart becomes hard, and I understand that. I understand that. Can I encourage you, my friend? Today is a day to get freedom from that. The hardened heart, yes, it can't be bullied as easily, but guess what: the hardened heart also can't receive the seed, the word of God. It misses out on so much of life. Because when you harden your heart, when people who love you are trying to help you, very often you take it as offense. Or you wonder what's really the purpose behind this, or it's so hard to receive a gift or a compliment or a smile without thinking what are they really trying to get at? Soften your heart, my friend. Get freedom today and have a heart that can receive all the good that God has in store for you; a life full of joy. A life full of purpose, meaning, friendship, love, kindness. And God will begin to build something in you that you probably wanted when you were a child. You can still get it, even if you're 99 going on 100, God can soften your heart today, and use you for great things. It's hard to soften your heart in a mean world, isn't it? Just as a straw poll, is the world getting nicer or meaner? What do you think? I was surprised in the first service, and it seems like you feel this way, too. Can I actually get an audible – is it nicer or meaner, what do you think? (AUDIENCE – meaner) Meaner. Overwhelmingly, everyone says meaner. I actually wasn't sure. If you feel like the world is getting meaner, you're right. There is actual clinical evidence that's pointing to the fact that we're getting meaner as Americans in general. It has nothing to do with religion or political persuasion. Gender is a factor. Men are actually meaner than women, believe it or not. That's maybe no surprise. I'm not going to get into that. That's not relevant. But no matter what, you think about how progressive society has become, how much we've addressed the issues of bullying, how much training we have in our workplaces against abuse and bullying and sexual harassment; how much money the government has spent on fighting these things, and yet, it's getting worse. It's getting worse. The National Institute of Health, which is a prestigious institution, that did a study in 1994 and found that less than 1% of Americans struggle with narcissistic personality disorder, and less than 1% of Americans struggled with anti-social personality disorder. By the way, that second one is colloquially we call it sociopath. Like sociopathy. They found that less than 1% of Americans were narcissists. A narcissist is someone that is completely frozen in themselves. It's all about me and no one else. A narcissist believes that anyone that is for me is a good person, and anyone that's not for me is a bad person universally. And it's a clinical problem. Sociopathy is the inability, really, to experience enough empathy or compassion for your neighbor to not do harm to them. So a sociopath has some feelings like that, but not enough to not steal or be violent or manipulate people, and they're real clinical problems. And so the 1994, less than 1% of Americans were in either of these categories. Twenty years later, they did the exact same study in the exact same way with the same sample size, and they found out that now, 6.2% of Americans have narcissistic personality disorder. Meaning not that they have big egos, there's a difference, but they are literal clinical narcissists that they need actual clinical help with. And 3.7% of Americans are sociopaths. Now that's crazy. That means that three and a half out of every person in a room with a hundred people is going to be a sociopath and six of those people are going to be a narcissist. And so in a world that's getting more that way, it's getting harder to have a soft heart, is it not? You get treated poorly, stolen from. We had our mailbox broken into recently. You have things like this that happen enough times, you finally say God, I don't trust you with my life anymore. It's time for me to take charge and fight for myself. It's time for me to harden my heart. I can't trust you with this. Can I tell you, friend, that is from the enemy. I want to encourage you that even though the world is getting meaner, you can soften your heart. I hate quoting Nietzsche, but when you have to quote Nietzsche, you have to quote Nietzsche. And he said be careful when you're fighting monsters that you don't become one yourself. And that's often what happens is narcissistic parents create narcissistic children. Sociopathic parents often create sociopathic.. I'm not a clinician, so I really don't have the.. I'm not qualified to really speak to this; I'm just speaking as a pastor. The New York Times also.. I appreciate, did a follow-up on the impact of lockdowns on children and they did a study of teenagers, actually, it was a forgotten group often when you study children. They studied eight thousand children and found that during the lockdown 55% of teenagers experienced emotional abuse from their parents. Now for all the dads in the room that are like emotional abuse? These snowflakes, I'm sure. Emotional abuse.. they didn't ask did you experience emotional abuse, they defined it.

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And emotional abuse means did you receive persistent belittling and insulting from your parents using swearing, and 55% of them said yes. Persistently my parents belittled and insulted me using swearing during the lockdown. Of those students, 11% of teenagers experienced physical abuse. So physical abuse in this study was defined as persistent hitting, kicking and/or biting. Man, that is so sad. You think about in life just going to the grocery store, or going to the bank, and maybe you had good parents, but you get to the bank and somebody's rude to you or mean to you, we just never know their story, do we. We never knew who was beaten by their parents or called these names by their dad or by their mom, or persistently hurt and wounded. Maybe you were that way. Maybe you were taught. Maybe you did that to your kids, and you regret it now and you were taught that that's the way to raise a disciplined child, but you regret it. You see in life we learn to adapt to our environments when we don't have the real comfort of a good healthy community. Very often, we just survive ourselves. We just muscle up. We just get tougher. And then we find there's some freedom in that. I was this way. I remember when I was a kid in school. I would, I was a little guy, and I was always a sweet friendly happy guy, and I remember in sixth grade, I finally hit back. I remember being hit, like actually being beat up by two kids, and I fought back, and I won, which felt great. But after that, I got this thing in me of powering up, and it gave me a lot of freedom. And maybe you got that, too, and there's some good that can be had in that. But if that happens enough, you begin to become the monster! When people want to help you, love you, be kind to you, and you don't trust them or you get a little afraid, WHOOSH the wall goes up. BAAH the heart gets hardened, and that's not for us. I want to say to you, we need Jesus. That's basically it. We need the Lord. We just need Him. There are no amount of programs, training, money to be spent fixing others. It's time to look in the mirror and say Lord, I want to become a tough-minded person with a tender heart. I want to be a strong person that is gentle. I want to be a tough person that exercises mercy, love and kindness. But so many of us are the opposite of that. Tough on the outside, but very sad and weak on the inside. My friend, today I just want to say that if we soften our hearts and become soft to the Lord, He can do a good thing in our lives. You might have some rough memories of something that somebody did to you. Forgive them. Doesn't mean you have to let them back into your life, but you can forgive them the same way God forgave you. I remember once when I was in Thailand, and I went two months eating chicken, rice and egg and friend grub worms, and that's not a joke, and water, bad water. And finally, towards the end of that, I was 15 years old, and I finally saw a place in the.. it was weird, in like a little village in the jungle had like a little.. our version of like a liquor store? And they had chips, and I got some Cheetos. Real Cheetos. And I didn't have any money, and my project director gave me like a couple bucks, and I bought some Cheetos, and I was like.. opened it, and I was like taking it nice and slow, and I was just like (SNIFFS) and I smelled it, and I took a Cheeto and because I'm a dramatic person even back when I was 15, with all my friends I went (MMMMMM) I took a bite, and it actually was amazing. And then, I'm not even joking, a monkey grabbed the bag out of my left hand, ran up a tree and looked down and he goes (SKREECHES) and then like started eating my Cheetos. But he was like 30-feet away. And I've always hated monkeys ever since. Oh, soften my heart to monkeys among other things. I don't know what happened in your life, but it just happens. The world.. guess what: until Christ comes back, there's no amount of tinkering, there's no amount of programs and training. Those things are good and they're worthwhile and they can help, but they're never going to make the world free of bullies. They're never going to make the world free of insults, but God can make you the kind of person that can let that go, that can live every moment with an open heart, that can enjoy a good meal with friends, that can gather here in worship and sing songs with a smile on your face, that can go on a walk and sense His spirit, that can enjoy a sunny day. You can even enjoy a rainy day with a cup of coffee. Lord knows we do here in California. Rainy days are like holidays. It's like everybody takes a day off and.. Okay, I'm behind. The scripture today is Matthew chapter 21. What, what, what did I do? All right, I'm just being a dork, I guess. Something about monkeys. I have another one about Spaniards, but I won't. Anybody been to Spain? And that's where this conversation ends. All right. Matthew chapter 21. I have people often, especially being Presbyterian, that they're like I want to grow in my relationship with God, so should I go to seminary? And what you would learn in seminary is basically one simple thing – read the text closely and try and read the text in a way as if you were alive when that book was written in the language and place it was written. That's basically what seminary teaches you to do. And that's what I'm going to attempt to do in three minutes.. six minutes with this text. It says "this took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet" so we're talking about the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem.

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“Say to daughter Zion, see, your king comes to you gentle and riding on a donkey, and on a colt, and on the foal of a donkey.” All the pastors got upset at me because I said foul. By the way, a donkey is a symbol, and a horse is a symbol. In those days, if you rode on a horse, it meant we’re going to war. But if you rode on a donkey, it meant it’s time for peace, we’re not going to war. Okay? Catch that. “The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. They brought the donkey and the colt, and they placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road.” Those branches are like flags or symbols of a way of viewing Israel. The palm branch was the symbol for the Hasmonean Dynasty. We’re going to talk about that in just a second. But it was basically a symbol of Israeli pride and nationalism. And actually was the symbol of saying let’s go to war. “The crowds that went ahead of Him and those that followed shouted Hosanna,” which means save us, right? “Hosanna to the son of David.” This phrase “son of David” is a term for the Messiah that means a king Messiah. Like someone who’s going to be like Lord of the Rings, the king has returned, right? “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest heaven.” So again, they’re saying save us, save us, save us! Save us from what? Nobody in that crowd is thinking save us from our sins, for example. Nobody is thinking save me from whatever – my anger issues, save me from my alcoholism. There’s one thing and one thing alone – they’re saying save me from Rome. “When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked who is this? The crowds answered this is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee. Jesus entered the temple courts and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the moneychangers, and the benches of those selling doves. It is written, he said to them, my house will be called a house of prayer, but you’re making it a den of robbers. Then the blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them all.” If we’re reading this like a first century person, there’s an obvious symbol here that you have Jesus riding in on a donkey saying I am the prince of peace, and they’re saying we don’t want a prince of peace, we want you to be a general. And they’re laying down these palm fronds that are saying free us from Rome. Do we have a picture of the temple, by the way? So you can see they actually have a road there where He would have gone. Remember, we always think they’re laying palm fronds in the city. They’re not. They’re laying it on the road between Bethpage and the city, so it’s like they go down a gulley – if you’ve ever been to Israel before, you’ve seen this, like up where Bethany and Mount of Olives is, as you go down into the Kidron Valley and then come up, there’s a road that goes down. That would have been the road where they were laying the palm fronds and celebrating the coming of Jesus to the city. And where they wanted Him to go, and probably thought He would go, is.. you see this castle up on the right here? That’s called the Antonia Fortress, and that had a garrison of thousands of Roman soldiers. And if you look at the way that the temple.. so this middle part is the temple, which was the heart of Jewish worship, if you look at the way, there’s all these parapets along the thing there, you see that? Those little things where you can shoot arrows through the notches. You see that? And notice how there is a gate from that castle that goes onto this upper top part of the wall, and it’s a very subtle threat. It’s the Romans saying you guys’ down there worship, but at any moment, if you get out of line, you’re going to be surrounded with soldiers looking down on you in a kill box. The Jewish people hated that Antonia Fortress. They hated the Romans. And they wanted Jesus to kick them out. And this was an echo of something that happened about a hundred and fifty years before. There was a guy named Judas Maccabee. If you’re Jewish and you celebrate Hanukkah, you celebrate the cleansing of the temple, Judas comes in and frees the Israeli people from the Greeks. Judas goes into the temple, and he clears it, but the way they viewed that is you’re getting the Greeks out of the temple, right? And this time they want Jesus to get the Romans out. Instead of going to the Antonia Fortress, though, Jesus goes through that golden.. it’s called the golden gate right there. And He would have gone right in there, right into the court of the Gentiles and started kicking over tables. And that was not at all what they expected. When they said “save us” they did not mean save us from us. They were perfectly happy with the moneylenders there. They liked how things were going in the temple. When they said “save us” they meant save us from Rome! Bring freedom. There are a million pilgrims in Israel, you could literally march up to Pontius Pilate and say get out, and he would actually leave because he’d be outnumbered. But instead, He enters the temple. And so here’s the Mishnah. When we cry out to God and say, “save us,” we’re usually saying save me from something out there. And God does often save us from those things out there. Isn’t He a good God? He saves us from those things. He helps us in those times. But almost never when we say save us are we saying save me from me. Save me from me! Save me from all the stuff that keeps everyone at an arm’s length.

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But what if the best way that God can save you is by saving you from your sin? Or from all of the stuff that causes you to have a hardened heart. My friend, would you soften your heart today? Would you soften your heart to God and to your neighbor? Would you soften your heart to life? Beware – because the more you harden your heart in life, the more you lose control of what to do with your heart. This last thing, in the Bible it says that God hardened Pharaoh's heart. Well that does not seem just or right at all, does it. When Moses was sent to free the Hebrew people from being enslaved by Pharaoh, it says that God hardened Pharaoh's heart. That just does not seem right. But if you look at the order; every time a plague hits Egypt, something happens to Pharaoh's heart, and we have a list here. Let's look at this together. This is the first one. Pharaoh's heart in Exodus 7 became hard. Then Pharaoh hardened his own heart. He made a choice. Then, Pharaoh's heart was passively.. it was just hard. Then Pharaoh hardened his own heart again. Then Pharaoh's heart was hard. Then the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, you see. There becomes something in life where the more you harden your own heart, the more it gets out of your control. It's not too late, my friend. Do not fall into the trap where because of whatever, because of life, because of how life has treated you. I know your life has been hard because of what your ex did to you, or your parents did to you, or whatever, you've just learned to harden your heart, today I want you to get freedom. Begin to love people again, and to begin to trust and receive love from your neighbor freely. Be able to enjoy your life without shame or guilt. Begin to open your heart to joyful experiences. Begin to be slow to mercy.. no. Slow to anger, quick to mercy. Kind, gentle. So many of us carry the burden of having to say it like it is, or be the tough guy, or isn't somebody going to do something? Sometimes you do have to do that, but guess what – most of the time, like 99% of the time, you don't have to do anything. You can give it to the Lord. You can do your best and forget the rest. You can soften your heart and enjoy your life. When we have fight, it gives us like these hard fists. When fists hold on tight, and fists punch, but you can't hug someone with a fist, really. It takes an open hand. When you let go, you open your hands to what God has for you. Open hands bless people. Open hands embrace people. So soften your heart. God's got something really good in store for you today. Close your eyes with me for a minute and let your shoulders drop. And forgive life. Forgive life for the way that you've been walked on. Forgive your parents, forgive your ex, forgive the bullies, forgive the people online that said something about you. Forgive your colleagues. And let go of your need to feel angry at them and entrust your life to the Lord. Just soften your heart and in your own way, up to you, just ask the Lord to forgive you, and ask Him to make you into a new creation, and just allow Him to speak His word in your heart, and trust that the path He has for you is a good path that leads to a more joyful life. Lord, we just ask for that. We soften our hearts, and we say thank you and we love you, it's in Jesus' name we pray, amen.

BENEDICTION – Bobby Schuller

Thank you guys so much for being here. Way to go! You came to church! Pat yourself on the back, proverbially or literally. Both are fine. 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.