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GOOD MORNING/INVOCATION – Bobby & Hannah

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

HS: Happy Christmas season, visitors and church family. We are happy to be with you. As we begin to celebrate the season that God gave us Jesus, may the Holy Spirit give you the power to grasp how deep and long and wide is Christ' love for you. You, right where you are, are divinely loved.

BS: Amen. We're so glad you're here with us. Let's begin with a word of prayer. Father, we thank you so much that you sent your son into our hurting world. That He turned everything around. That He redeemed us, renewed us and restored us. We pray in Jesus' name today that every person would leave this place, or finish watching this program, Lord, that they would be a completely new person. Father, we thank you and we love you, it's in Jesus' name we pray, amen.

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

SCRIPTURE – Isaiah 9,2+6-7 - Hannah

In preparation for the message, Isaiah 9:2 and 6 through 7: The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned. For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.
Hallelujah.

ADVENT CANDLE LIGHTING – Jacobson family

LANI: Hello, we are the Jacobson family, and today we are going to be lighting the advent candle.

TEYO: The people who have walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who have lived in a land of deep darkness - on them light has shined. We join with our brothers and sisters around the world, lighting a candle each week as we journey through Advent.

LANI: Today, we light the candle of Hope. Even though the world seems like a dark and violent place, we know that the light of the world in God's Son is coming and He brings our salvation! Standing against all suffering and darkness, we light this candle. Together, we proclaim to the world that, in Christ, we have eternal hope.

LEIA: We invite you to join in unison as we pray together: Faithful God, out of the chaos and dark violence of our times you come bringing the light of hope. Renew us, that we may work toward the coming of our Messiah, hope for all the nations. God of promise, God of hope, into our darkness come. Through the hope of the ages, Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.

WELCOME/DECLARATION – Bobby Schuller

Welcome, we're glad you're here. Welcome to Shepherd's Grove. Welcome to the Hour of Power, if you're watching online. No matter who you are, we're glad you're here. 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 Holy Spirit. 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.

Hope is for Noobs

MESSAGE/PRAYER – Bobby Schuller "Hope is for Noobs"

Today is the first Sunday of advent, and traditionally in the Reformed church and many other Christian churches, you follow a pattern of themes for each day, and it coincides with the advent candle wreath. Today is the Sunday of Hope, and boy do we need hope, right? Hope is something that sustains us when we're going through hard times, hope is the thing that keeps us positive; we lose our hope, we begin to lose our dreams and our spirit. But can I tell you something? If you've been a Christian for a long time, hope is not enough. Hope is not enough. And God wants more from you than hope. He wants faith. He wants you to have hope but He wants hope realized in knowledge and action, and that is exactly what faith is. Today's sermon is entitled Hope is for Noobs. Do you know what a noob is? A noobie. A novice. A rookie. A beginner. A green horn. A neophyte. Any others? It's for beginners! It's for noobies. Hope is for people that are new to the faith. Hope is for people that have an excuse to not trust God. Hope is for people who have not studied the word. Hope is for people that think maybe I'll try it on. But if you've been a believer for many years, and you can say 'when I was in that dark place God answered my prayer,' or 'when I was in that difficult time, God brought me through,' God expects more than hope from you. He expects some faith. That you really trust that He is good and He'll bring you through, and He'll do what He said He would do. To have faith means to take action, real practical moves in the direction of the godly hope that's in your heart. If you've seen God move in your life, you have no business just sitting around hoping. Today it's time to believe and believe is measured on what you do, not what you claim to believe is true. I remember as a child when I used to hope in God and that was all I did, until God surpassed my hopes. This seems like a really silly little story, but when you're eight, nine and ten, these stories do something to you that's really good. When I was a kid, we used to fish a lot. We had this little Boston Bay liner boat that we kept on the side of the house, and we'd haul it out to the ramp and over time it got bigger, but back in the day, very often we would forget to bring food with us. And if you've ever been out deep-sea fishing, you know there's this space between Catalina Island and the coast, and when you're out there, you can't see land anywhere. As a kid, your imagination elevates this experience even more. We're out there, its two in the afternoon, we haven't eaten anything all day and we forgot to bring food. We had water, the boat makes water; it has a desalinizer, but that's all we had was water and I remember like my dad going oh, I hope we get some food, meaning I hope we catch some fish. And he said let's pray, because we were both feeling a little.. let's pray that God will bring us food. And what we're really doing, because my dad just loves fishing, we're praying really that we'll catch some fish. But we didn't pray for fish, we prayed for what? For food. Right? For food. Lord, feed us. Can I tell you something? As someone who's been fishing my whole life, I've been covered in scales and blood and guts my whole life. I was fishing all the time. Can I just tell you something? I don't like fish. I've never liked fish, I didn't like it when I was a kid, I don't like it today. There are a couple of fish that I will tolerate, like I do like fish tacos, which is tilapia, which is the fish that tastes the most like chicken, deep fried in oil, breaded and surrounded by Mexican food. That's a good fish I can eat. And I had a friend of ours take us for a steamed Chinese fish once that was like in the salty soy sauce that was also very good. Those are the two experiences in about ten thousand fish dishes I've eaten that were positive. When we're praying, we're thinking fish, but I'm hoping for something else and I'm just praying, God, please don't let it be barracuda. Let it be a delicious fish like a blue fin or something like that. Anyway, so we're praying, we pray; going along, not much time passes and this is true story, you got to ask my dad. I always have to say that because it seems like so farfetched. Out on the horizon, there is this glimmer of light. We're looking through the binoculars trying to sort out what is that thing? So we pull up, we get closer and closer. It is a plastic Walmart or Costco sized barrel of my favorite thing when I was eight: Jack Links original – beef jerky, man! It was beef jerky! Really it was Slim Jim's, but this is the only picture I could find. And it was wrapped in plastic and then they had the little individual ones like you get at the little league games. And as we went around, we found like ten of these floating in the ocean! We like pick them up with our little nets, just me and my dad. The whole bridge was full of these Costco sized beef jerky links. No fish for me, man! You know beef jerky is like bacon on the go. It was like the best thing I could have ever had. I was so thrilled. It was funny because even as a kid, that still sticks with me as an adult about the way God loves to surpass our hopes. When we're thinking fish, He's thinking beef jerky, you know what I mean by that? There is something amazing about.. and I think back, and if I was forced to watch my life.

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I would see and maybe you would too, a playback of many moments like this when I'm praying for my hopes but God gives me more than what I'm hoping for. I have lived through enough of those type of experiences where I've realized God doesn't want hope from me anymore. He wants faith! He wants me to see something much bigger, and to take real practical action in the direction of the thing I'm hoping for. There's a really stupid movie way back from the 90's, it has a really brilliant line in it. I'm not even going to say the movie because I don't want you to watch it, but there's this line where they're talking about faith, and it says that when we're young, when we're children, our spiritual cup is very small. And it doesn't take much to fill it and to make us feel closer to God. But as we get older, and I would say as a Christian, as we grow in our faith, that cup gets bigger. That cup gets bigger. And we need more of God in our life. We need more times of prayer. We need greater actions of faith. We need more of Him! More of His word and His life. And if we neglect that, we feel empty in a way that we wouldn't when we were children. There's something that happens in life where once God reaches your hopes enough times, He wants you to start really stepping out in faith. A great example of that in the Bible is when the Hebrew people are brought out of Pharaoh's land, and they come to the Red Sea, God just parts it for them, right? And they walk through it. It's this amazing miracle. But remember what happens the next time they get to a body of water, the Jordan River? This time God doesn't part it for them first. He tells them to step in the water, and as they step it will part, and they have to believe Him. They have to believe Him. As they step into the water, that's when it parts. See because He's expecting them to trust that He will do what He did before, but He wants more faith from them. He wants them to stretch themselves. He wants them to go farther than where they were before. I think that's what God wants for us, is that when we walk in His life and we see Him answer prayers and do things for us, He expects more from us than hope. He expects from us faith. And my friend, faith is actions. Faith without actions is dead, meaning it's not faith. It's not faith. In the west, we have this real problem called the "knowing/doing gap." You know what that means? It means that we study things, we go to class. There are lots of people today who are getting master's degrees in things, but they've never really done anything. They have these lofty educations and these amazing courses and all this hard work that they've put into learning, but they've not done anything with it. They haven't built a building or created an organization or designed a great policy. All they've done is kept taking more classes. I'm convinced that many of my colleagues when I was in graduate school were there because they were afraid of life. They were afraid of actually putting into practice what they've learned. As a disciple of Jesus, don't let that happen to you. Be educated. Learn and study, but remember that the purpose of education is practice. Applying what you know. Applying what you've learned in real life. Stepping out in faith. I will say something that's not very Presbyterian of me, but we reformed people, we love education, we believe in educated clergy, and boy do we depend on our creeds and confessions, and we should. But I will tell you your faith is not measured by what you affirm. Your faith is measured by what you do. All those creeds and confessions, maybe when you were a kid, you took catechism or you took some of these courses or Bible study classes. They're all intended to get you to do something different that you weren't doing before. If we believe these things, something should change in the way we behave and live life. God wants us to be doers of the word, not just hearers. He wants us to believe and enact the kind of life that we hope for, rather than just hoping it'll come around. And I know, my friend, you are a person of faith, and I want you to know I believe in you. You say Bobby, you don't understand. I can't do it. Can I just tell you something? I agree with you. I can't do it, either. It's not you who's doing it. It's God IN YOU. It's you trusting and believing that God really is in me, and that these things He's calling me to do, well I can't do it by myself, but we can do it together. If it's a kind of dream and kind of thing that only God can do, that's the perfect kind of thing to pursue, because then who gets the glory? The Lord does! And your faith continues to grow, and you continue to depend on Him. Faith in action is super important. Too often, we want to say well, God responds to Christian claims, or God responds to whatever label you put on yourself. But the Bible is full of examples of the way God blesses people who don't believe all the right things, but just trust Him and have faith. Isn't that interesting? That rubs me the wrong way, how about you. Well it should. Should show you that God cares a lot about faith. Faith. If you have two people who are terrified of flying, and the first one affirms planes, and says I know planes are safe, I trust in the pilot, I believe in the statistics and the engineering. I know if I get on that plane, I will be perfectly safe, but I'm still afraid so I'm not going to do it. And then the second person says I have my doubts about that pilot. Has he been drinking? And I'm not sure about that plane. It looks a little rickety. But she still gets on the plane, maybe she's Baptist but she still had a glass of wine before so she wouldn't freak out.

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And maybe she had her son-in-law tie her to the seat, but she still got on that plane, who has faith? Tell me. Who has faith? The one who says it, or the one who does it? The one who does it! Faith without action is meaningless. God's asking you today do something! Remember once I had a sermon that was called "Do Stuff." Do stuff! There are two stories where God responds to faith, even though the doctrine was wrong. So the first that I'm mentioning today, a widow in Zarephath. So many of us know this story. If you have your Bible's you can follow along with me in 1st Kings chapter 17. There was a terrible draught in the land and everybody, because of draught, was not only thirsty, but people didn't have food. The farms were dried up. Cattle were dying. It says some time later, the brook dried up because there'd been no rain in the land, and the word of the Lord came to him, came to Elijah, and said go to Zarephath in the region of Sidon and stay there. I have directed a widow there to supply you with food. Okay? A couple things here. A widow in the bronze age in the ancient world was basically like saying probably a homeless person. Right? Somebody's calling. It's the Lord. Look, a widow basically means a person who will be begging. So one of the things about a faith like Judaism is they had provisions in the law to care for widows, but in those days, outside in the pagan faiths, a widow and her son were like beggars, usually. It's already interesting that he says I'm going to pick a homeless person to supply you with all your food and everything you need. And then the funnier thing is I have directed a widow there to supply you with the food. The widow doesn't even know! It makes it sound like the Lord told the widow. She doesn't even know. So he, Elijah, went to Zarephath. And when he came to the town gate; town gate is where you beg, a widow was there gathering sticks. He called to her and asked would you bring me a little water in a jar so I may have a drink? As she's going to get it, he called, oh and bring me please a piece of bread. She says to him, as surely as the Lord your God lives. Everybody say: your God. What does that mean? Not my God. She probably is a Baal worshipper. She replied I don't have any bread. I don't have any bread at all. Only a little handful of flour in a jar, and a little olive oil in a jug. I'm gathering a few sticks to take home and make a meal for myself and for my son that we may eat it and die. What does that mean? Have you ever been really hungry? Like out on a fishing boat for hours and you haven't eaten? But really, have you been days without food? It is a scary feeling and a horrible feeling. The only thing that I can think of that would be worse than that is if you had a little baby, a little son or daughter, a little child who was starving and you're starving and your child needs food and there's nothing you can do to help them. What a horrible feeling that would be. A horrible. She has just this little like just enough to make like a little pancake, right? Just a little thing for her and her son to split, eat and then die of starvation, and this guy has, let me use a Jewish word here, the hutzpah, the hutzpah to say give it to me. Give it to me. Elijah says to her don't be afraid. That's the number one command in the Bible. The most mentioned command in the Bible, by the way. They say it's in there 365 times, once for every day of the year. Don't be afraid. Go home and do as you've said, but first make me a small loaf of bread. I love it. Make it for me first. Give me the bread, and then after that, you can make something for yourself and your son. Hutzpah, man. That's there. For this is what the Lord, the God of Israel says, the jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day of the Lord sends rain on the land. And she went away and did as Elijah told her. So there was food every day for Elijah, and for the woman, and for her family, for the jar of flour was not used up, and the jug of oil did not run dry in keeping with the word of the Lord. Look, she has all the wrong doctrines, she's the poorest person in the town, and this is such a God thing to say, I'm going to use the person that has less than nothing to give you everything you need. He said it to her one time, and something sparked in her heart, and she believed, and it wasn't just reflected on what she said, it was reflected in what she did. Imagine that sacrifice – giving your starving child's bread first to the man of God, believing because it was the word of God that it would be true, that you would have everything you need. What faith. That is something that makes me.. I just know God responds to faith. And an action like that is incredibly brave. Wow. Incredibly brave. She was an outsider. She wasn't a Jew. She didn't know the Lord but she had faith. And boy did she believe in Him after that. Another story, another Gentile, Naaman the Syrian. Naaman was a great general for the king of Aram and he had leprosy. Covered in bandages, suffering all the time, never getting well, trying all sorts of things, obviously an influential, probably wealthy man. Can't find a cure to leprosy. And there was an Israeli girl, a servant who said to him, my Lord, if you go to my home in Samaria in Israel, there's a man there who can heal you, a man of God. And she said you should go. He'll heal you. And so this commander goes to his king, the king of Aram and says, I've heard there's a man who can heal me in Israel, can I go? They're neighbors, so there's always a little tension. And the king says absolutely you can go. I will send you a hall pass, a letter.

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You can give that letter to the king of Israel, tell him you're here with my permission, and bring this menagerie of animals and gifts and such to him as a peace offering. He goes, and he comes to the court of the king of Israel, and he says I've heard that you can heal leprosy. Here's all this stuff, here's a letter from my king, now what? And the king looks at the man and he tears his robes. You know what that means in Jewish culture? When you tear your shirt or tear your robes? It's what happens when the worst thing you can think of happens to you – the loss of a child, losing everything, your business goes bankrupt and you tear the shirt. It's a tearing, it's like a reflection what's happening in your heart, just torn. Why would the king of Israel do that? In history we call it a caesious belly when another nation is trying to cook up a reason to go to war. He says you sent this guy to me and now if I don't heal him, you're going to declare war on us, and you're going to blah, blah, blah. And so this king just starts freaking out. You ever do that in your life? Something happens and it just triggers and you just start spinning your wheels and you tear your robe. And Elijah, hearing this, sends to the king and says why did you tear your robes? Send the man to me! Why? Why would you tear your robes? Do we not serve the God of Israel who could heal this man? And maybe God's even saying that to you right now. When bad things happen, it's so easy to catastrophize something and tear your robes, and God is saying why would you tear your robe? This story is not over yet for you, my friend. It's not over yet. The best part of your story is yet to come. Don't tear your robes. Don't give up. God is saying I can do anything, even heal a man of leprosy. And so the king of Israel sends this man Naaman to Elijah and this commander had some ego problems, and so the prophet doesn't even meet him, he just sends out a messenger. And the messenger says to him, go wash in the Jordan River seven times and you'll be healed. So Elisha's just like I'm kind of too busy. And Naaman gets so angry. It says he's enraged. I think it's because, this is just Bobby Schuller, okay. I don't know. But I think it's because I read in one of the studies on this, that is a common practice to wash yourself seven times in a holy river. So he says are not the rivers of Damascus even better than this silly old river, the ones in.. and why would I go into the Jordan? And enraged he begins to march, and clearly so, it was like a two month.. this is the Jordan, by the way. Beautiful picture, isn't it? This is the real Jordan in Israel. Naaman, enraged, begins to walk away, all this planning, all this work and he's like just another snake oil salesman. And one of the servants says, my lord, why wouldn't you just try it? This is very clever. If he'd given you something really hard, you would have done it. Something hard would be like hang from the bridge by your toes for two days, or don't eat for a month. You want to give me something really hard like that, you would have done it. But because it was this simple thing, you won't do it. Even though his heart was wrong, he believed all the wrong stuff, he still, and it took convincing from some random girl henpecking him to do it, he did it. That was enough for God! Think about that. Had the wrong heart, the wrong motive, the wrong everything, but he still did what was right, and God was able to use that. That's faith. And so he goes into the water and he's healed and he becomes a worshipper of God. But the thing we need to see here in both these stories is everything about these stories is wrong, they're not Jewish, they're not any of these things, but they hear the word of God, and they do it, and that is enough for God. In the end, it is the action that proves whether or not you really believe. Do you really believe? Do you really believe? Show me. Show me. It's not about emotions and feelings. All of us are emotional people. It's about what you do. And in the end, that's what defines so much of our faith. It's interesting because these are the two stories that Jesus references when He goes to His hometown and is rejected. That's why I used these two. Jesus comes from a village; it was probably about three hundred people. It's a new village in Galilee called Nazareth. Nazer means a shoot, and it's a reference to one of the advent passages we always read – out of the shoot of Jesse. And they believed that they were gathering people of the line of David who were descendants to live in this town, and they believed that from one of them the Messiah would come. But their belief in what the Messiah would be was not the way we see Christ as the son of man, right? There are kind of multiple prophecies, all this, and one was the most common, son of David. That means a king, an actual theocrat that comes and reigns over as a priestly kind of religious king. That's who they pictured. They forgot about this long passage in Daniel about the son of man who will come riding on the clouds and be at the right hand of the Father and all this stuff. And that's, remember, what Jesus.. anyway. He's in Nazareth and He gives this sermon, and He says I'm the one, I'm the Messiah. Do you remember what they say? We always get this passage confused. They go isn't this Joseph and Mary's son? Don't we know His brothers and His sisters? And then what do they say? It says - this is in Luke - and they spoke well of Him. They were excited that they were right! That yes, it was our guy from our town with the right label and the right blood and the right everything.

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Oh, isn't that great! We always think that they hated Him. They don't hate Him until He references these stories. That's when they hate Him. He looks at them and He says "truly I tell you no prophet is accepted in his hometown." Now up to this point, He didn't perform any miracles, it says, because they didn't really have faith that He could do miracles. "I assure you that there are many widows in Israel in Elijah's time, and the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them but to the widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon." Elijah was sent to a Gentile, a pagan. "And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elijah the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed, only Naaman the Syrian." What's He referring to? He is referring to what we affirm in our scriptures that God does not care about our labels. God doesn't care about our education, He doesn't care if you're from Nazareth, He doesn't care if you're Jewish through and through, or Christian, you've been a Christian two thousand years, your family. None of that matters to Him. What He wants to know is do you believe? Do you really have faith? If so, get on the plane, prove it to me. If so, stop hoping like a noob and start acting like a believer. Get out there and do something in direction that God's called you to do. Can I tell you something? Nobody is coming! Nobody is coming to get your destiny for you! Nobody is coming to make you live a healthy life. Nobody is coming to study the word of God for you. Nobody is coming to raise your kids right. Nobody is coming to build the life you know you were called to live. There is one person who can do that, and that person is you! God has given you all that you need to attain what you're hoping for. Stop hoping and start acting like you really believe this stuff and watch how God delivers. The Lord says that anyone who has the faith of a mustard seed could say to this mountain move, and it would be cast into the sea. You know what He means by that mustard seed? He doesn't mean up here, He means here. He means here. Got some new shoes, by the way. He means that you do, you do what you claim to believe. He's like if you just took a tiny little step instead of just talking about it, you took a tiny step in the direction, and kept taking little steps, you watch and see what I can do in your life, and it is good. It's so good. Now I feel like I'm being mean. I'm don't mean to be mean; I love you guys. I want you to know that the living word, life and authority of God is in your body. And we think of all the things that's wrong, He's in there. So I want to encourage you, if you have a dream in your heart, just go do it. Start doing things to get closer to that thing, and you'll be grateful that you got to see God work in your life. He wants to use you. We always compare ourselves to other people. No more. God's going to use you and do great things, so believe in it. Don't give up, don't write a bad ending to what could be a good story. A great thing is coming. Father, we thank you and we love you. And we pray that you'd give us the courage to step out of the boat and onto the water. That you'd give us the faith to hear the word and do the word. Lord, we love you and we trust you and we thank you, it's in Jesus' name we pray, amen.

BENEDICTION – Bobby Schuller

BS: 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 Son and Holy Spirit, amen.