

Hour of Power Deutschland
Steinerne Furt 78
86167 Augsburg

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

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

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

IBAN:
DE43600501010002894829

BIC:
SOLADEST600

Büro Schweiz:

Hour of Power Schweiz
Seestr. 8
8594 Güttingen
Tel.: 071 690 07 81
info@hourofpower-schweiz.ch
www.hourofpower-schweiz.ch

Spendenkonto:

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

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GOOD MORNING – Bobby Schuller (BS) and Hannah Schuller (HS)

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

HS: And happy Easter, friends! Because He lives, we live! He has risen! (AUDIENCE – He is risen indeed)

BS: What a special day it is to be with you and your family or your friends or loved ones, we're so glad you're joining us today and we know God has a great word for you. Let's begin with a word of prayer. Father, we thank you so much for your power and your life within us. Thank you, Lord, that you conquered death this day. Thank you that sin, sickness, shame that used to live in us is no longer here, and on your word we stand, and by faith we will rise again. We thank you, Lord, and we love you. It's in Jesus' name we pray, all God's people said, amen.

HAVEN: Turn to the person next to you and say He is risen!

SCRIPTURE – Matthew 28,1-10 – Hannah Schuller

In preparation for the message, Matthew 28:1-10. After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven, and going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and they became like dead men. The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you." So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me." Church, He is risen! (AUDIENCE RESPONDS – He is risen indeed) Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER – Chad Blake

Will you join me in prayer. Jesus, we join with the choir and say alleluia; that today death is defeated. We have no fear. We know what the future holds, we know how the story ends, and so in the face of our darkness, in the face of our suffering, we can claim victory because we have you by our side. Lord, we pray that our church and that your church all around the world be a symbol of hope in that we point to you; that we point to your love and your mercy and your grace, and that lives are changed because we take the call of the gospel seriously. So Lord, we pray for that resurrection power. You say it is ours, and so Lord, let us live into it; let us leave this place energized for you, in Jesus' name we pray, amen.

DECLARATION – Bobby Schuller

Well we're glad you're here. Welcome everybody. 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 my neighbor. Thank, you can be seated.

The Prodigal Father

MESSAGE / PRAYER – Bobby Schuller – "The Prodigal Father"

Amen. Well, we're so glad you're here, and we're grateful you're joining us, wherever you are, whether you're sitting here in the church, or you're in Germany or Netherlands or South Africa, wherever you are, we're glad you're with us. Today is Easter, of course. We remember the resurrection of Jesus. It's amazing, I've actually been there. I've seen the tomb; I've actually put my hands on it. I've been to the places. I've walked in the Dead Sea, I've walked in the Sea of Galilee, I've walked around Jerusalem with my daughter Haven. It's an amazing thing, but it is a great thing to see an empty tomb and to see the symbol of what that means for me, what it means for all of us. It's interesting, whenever you see a picture of the tomb, it's always much bigger than it actually is. The entrance is about that big; it's about maybe three feet high, and the stone is about maybe two/three feet. Isn't that funny? It's not like some giant, but it's still heavy. Still a couple thousand pounds, I think. But it's an amazing thing. And what it says is that anyone who's lost, anyone who's dead, anyone whose sick can be saved. Anyone who's sick can be healed. Anybody who's dead who can be raised from the dead. Anyone who's lost can be found, and man, if you've ever felt lost, if you feel lost now, come home to the Lord.

One of the best things I think anyone today can hear is that you have the power. This is called Hour of Power, for those of you who are watching, and I want to promise you something – you have a lot more power than you know. So many of us are waiting for things to change in our life. We want our marriages and relationships to get better. We want our friendships to get better. We're waiting for a raise, we're waiting to get a better job, we're waiting for life to go our way; we're waiting for the weather to improve.

Friend, can I tell you, here's how life gets better – when you get better. When you recognize that I have the power today, I have the power to have a better marriage. I have the power to choose different people. I have the power to grow in value in the marketplace. I have the power to become a better friend, to build a business, to build my dreams, to do what I'm called to do. It's not going to happen until I make it happen. It's not going to happen until I change; until I do the work that it takes to become a new kind of person. And if you devote your life to becoming a new kind of person, not just today but day in and day out, your life will never be the same. It's not if you're perfect, but if you do your best and forget the rest. And if you pour it on every day to becoming who you're called to be, your life will never be the same, but it's up to you. You have way more power than you think.

Too many people say 'I'm too young' etc., until they get too old, and then they say 'I'm too old.' Look, there's always a reason but you have the power to change your life. The first thing you have to do, though, is you have to be at peace with God. Are you at peace with God today? Many of us, we grew up in church, and we lost our way. Some of us, we've never stopped going to church, but sort of in our heart we kind of feel lost, we feel broken, we feel like something's wrong.

And I want to encourage you today that there is a home, there is a place prepared for you, not just when you die, but right now to be in God's kingdom. Won't you come home to God? It is written there is no saint without a past. There's no sinner without a future. And boy are both of those things true, I can tell you.

On Friday, we celebrated what we call Good Friday. That's the crucifixion of Jesus Christ when He paid the price for all of mankind; that we could come before the Lord clean and pure. The Bible says that "he who knew no sin became sin that we could be called the righteousness of God." Wow, isn't that an amazing thing? Doesn't make a lot of sense to modern ears, but think about it this way. You've probably washed a car before. You got to your dirty car with a clean bucket of water, and when all was said and done, your car was clean, and the water in the bucket was (AUDIENCE – dirty) it was dirty.

So then, like a good Californian, you took that bucket of water and you poured it down the drain, and that went right out into the ocean, and that made for that little part of the ocean just a little bit dirty. And all that stuff, it floated on the surface of the water and then sank to the bottom of the ocean, and then a nice old lobster came along and gobbled it up and cleaned up the ocean floor until the ocean became clean and the lobster became dirty. And then you ate the lobster. You're like my lobster bisque tastes a little soapy, that's why. That's what it is. It's my car wash.

But we understand that, don't we, that to make something clean, something else becomes dirty. That's a universal truth, and this is what happened when Christ laid His life down for me and for you.

The Prodigal Father

We became clean and He became dirty. And when He was put in that grave, when He was raised from the dead, as Christians, we testify to the account that He left it there. That it stayed there. Your sin, your abuse, your loss, your betrayal, the things people did to you, you can let all of that stuff go. You can put it all in the grave.

I know for a lot of you, this has been a hard year. Maybe you got some bad news recently. Maybe you've had some tough times, but I want you to know, my grandfather said "tough times never last; tough people do." You can take that thing, you can put it in the grave, and you can make a decision today I'm going to get back on my feet and I'm going to become a brand-new creation. And most of all, I'm going to run into the arms of God. I'm going to come home and know that in His kingdom, He has a place for me, He has power for me, He has life for me, He has healing for you. He does. He has it for you today. So reach out to Him in faith.

Jesus shows us what God is like. You ever wondered what it would be like to sit down with God and have a cup of coffee? Look at Jesus, He'll show you the way. This is what He does. He shows us the way. Jesus, for a lot of the religious leaders in His day, was like a bit of a paradox. You know what a paradox is, right, when the more you try and impress people, the less impressed they are. What's another one? The more you try to be funny the less funny you are. I could go on. See, nobody laughed..

A paradox. Jesus was a paradox because on one hand He was so clearly a prophet, at least. I mean sent from God and He preached with power, He performed incredible miracles, raised people from the dead. Hundreds, thousands of people witnessed it, they wrote it down. But on the other hand, He did this thing that you're not supposed to do if you're a religious leader. He would eat with bad people, and when we say they're bad people, they really were bad people.

Zacchaeus really was a fraud, and really did steal money from poor people and used it to live a lavish lifestyle. Tax collectors in those days; I know we all hate tax collectors, don't we. But their tax collectors were really bad and they really did steal from people and really did lie, and they were arbitrary in the amount of taxes they could take, and you never knew how much they were taking. And even the fact that He would sit with prostitutes, for example. I mean just imagine this. Church is over and you go with your family to California Pizza Kitchen after this, and you see me sitting there, not with my family, but with ten local prostitutes and we're all having a grand old time drinking wine. You'd be like I don't know about Pastor Bobby. Seems like he's having kind of a lot of fun. Is that ministry or like what's happening there? Honestly, this is what's happening in Jesus' day.

You want to know what God is like? Look at Jesus. You want to know what God is like? Look at Jesus. He loves everybody. Even when you've lost your way, He loves you. Even when you're broken, He loves you. Even when you lost your patience, you feel like you weren't a very good mom or very good dad or very good friend or brother, sister, or kid, He loves you. He loves you. He's on your side. He's for you. He's not given up on you.

And this is the message that He's trying to get across to the religious leaders of His day, is yes, He is from God, but He's trying to convince the religious leaders that these people need help. They need love, they need kindness, they need friendship, and they need the word of God. They need the Holy Spirit. They need to be brought home. Not pushed out, not judged, not belittled, not criticized or bullied. They need a real friend, and this is who Jesus was to them.

And so one day Jesus is there eating with these types of people, and everybody that's looking at Him, these religious leaders, are judging Him, but they're like trying to figure it out in their mind. And so being able to read their hearts, Jesus looks across the room and He tells them, like a good rabbi would, three great stories that starts with a hundred, and then it goes to ten, and then it goes to one. The hundred goes like this. He says once there were a hundred sheep, and one of those sheep got lost. And the shepherd went out looking for the sheep because they know their sheep by name. They're like pets to them. They love these sheep. And he's looking everywhere and days go by, and finally finds the sheep, and he runs home with the sheep over his shoulders. He brings all his friends together and they all cheer and they celebrate because they found the lost sheep. And He says I'll tell you what – there will be more celebrating in heaven when one of God's kids is lost, when they're found. There will be way more celebrating in heaven over them, than there is over that lost sheep. They know what that looks like. They're in a shepherd community.

There's two ways that sheep get lost.. die, rather. There's two ways sheep die. The first way is the most obvious one – they give some wolf or coyote the best day of their life, right? They become a meal; become lamb chops for some predator and they're killed. But the second way, and maybe even more brutal way is when they actually just get lost like the poor Australian sheep Baah Rock.

The Prodigal Father

Yes, that's the name of this sheep. Baah Rock. Very clever. Poor Baah Rock, she got lost and was out somewhere for months, somewhere near Victoria Australia, and when they found her, I mean you look at this sheep and you see a sheep that looks fat and happy, right? I mean this looks like a happy sheep, right? It's been eating well, doing good, but when they sheered the sheep, they realized she's not fat and happy. She was actually blind because the wool had grown so much, it had covered her eyes. And when they removed all the wool, they also saw that she was skinny and gaunt and sickly and barely hanging on for life.

Now that's a model for the modern person today, isn't it. On the outside, we look fat and happy. On the outside, we look like things are going really well, but on the inside, we feel like we're dying. The Lord's looking for you. He wants to bring you home. Won't you come home? When they sheared poor Baah Rock, by the way, they got 80 pounds of wool, which by the way is either 61 sweaters or 490 pairs of socks. That's pretty good. So that's the first story.

Second story Jesus says there were ten silver coins. A woman had ten silver coins, and she lost one, and she swept her whole house looking for them, and she couldn't find it. This is a famous painting called The Bride of Bethlehem, and in it you see a depiction of a first century Jewish woman. Jewish women in those days, when they were married, would receive a headdress that was like our equivalent of a wedding ring. And on it they would have ten silver coins, and that was to represent the Ten Commandments.

And so just imagine this girl, she loses one of those coins, and every day she goes to the marketplace and someone says 'oh ma'am, you're missing one of your coins.' She's 'I know, I know!' this kind of thing. Every day she has to hear it. She's looking everywhere for it. Finally, one day she finds it. She's over the moon. She's thrilled. She gets all her friends together – guys, look! I found it! I found it! She brings them all together.

Some of you know the feeling of popping something back into place. She got to have that feeling. Imagine taking that silver coin and going (BAM) popping it right back into place and it's complete. See that's what the kingdom of God is like without you. Like something's missing, both in you and in the kingdom. This is where you belong. Too often, we think that.. silver is interesting. When it gets wet and when its left alone, it begins to tarnish. It gets this sort of green powdery substance on the outside. It doesn't really come off. You have to take a special chemical to get it off, but it starts to look bad. It looks worthless.

Can I tell you something, my friend? Silver does not lose its value just because it's tarnished. Maybe you've been tarnished. Maybe you've got this over something about the passing of time, and what you've gone through, and your disappointments and unfinished work, and all of the things that you'd hope would happen and didn't, and you feel tarnished, you feel like maybe your life's over or God's done with you. But no, God's not done with you. He's going to clean you up, He's going to fix you, He's going to make you just the way you need to be to do what you need to do. You're alive for a reason. Silver doesn't lose its value just because it's got a little tarnish on it. Sometimes we all get a little lost.

You ever lost something? TV's used to come with these things called dials. They usually had 13 channels, and every channel would make a clicking sound. And then some fool invented this thing called a remote control and everybody lost the only bit of exercise they ever got in a day – getting up off the couch to change the channel.

You ever lost a remote? It's a bummer. It is a bummer. I remember losing remotes, and we looked under every couch, you looked everywhere for it. Three weeks went by and we still couldn't find it. We had to use the little knob under the TV to do anything. It's terrible. Can I tell you the three best days of my life? The first is the day I was married. The second day was the birth of my children. And the third was the day we found this remote. I called everybody together and we jumped up and down holding this remote. And I can tell you there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one lost sinner than over Bobby finding his remote control.

We all know what it's like to lose something, and you can't find it, and the joy you get when you find something. It just borders a bit on the emotion that God feels when someone like you decides that today will be different than all the other days. That today will be a day when I'm found. That today will be a day when I'm alive. That today will be a day when I will come home.

And that brings us to the last story, the story of the prodigal father. We often call it the prodigal son. I preached this sermon a million times, and I call it the prodigal father. Growing up as a kid, I always thought prodigal meant sinful, but it doesn't. The word "prodigal" means lavish, wasteful, or extravagant. And boy is that the description of this father.

The Prodigal Father

His generosity, his grace, his beauty, his joy. Did you know God is the most joyful person in the universe? That's the kind of God that's calling you home.

Goes like this. Jesus is still looking at the religious leaders, in the third story, right? So hundred, ten, one. One prodigal father, He says. There was two sons. The youngest son, who was the rebel of the family, the black sheep, one day he tells his father I want my inheritance now. And in those days, that would be like saying I just want your money and I wish you were dead. Really. And in a face culture, this is horrible.

Strangely, the father actually agrees to give the kid, this young man, his inheritance. And he takes the money and he goes into a foreign land, and by the way, the Bible does not say he spent it on prostitutes. Just says he was wasteful with it. He went out and had some lavish spending, maybe he took some risky investments, maybe he bought a bunch of tulip bulbs or beanie babies or NFT's. But his money, one day, evaporates. It's gone. And there's a famine on the land, and so there's nobody to help him or give him a hand up.

And one day he finds himself starving, working in a pigsty. Now he's a Jewish man, right, so he's feeding and taking care of pigs, which is the most unclean, embarrassing thing you can think of. He's got rags on, no shoes on, covered in stink and filth. And he finds himself starving, looking at the pig food, wishing he could eat it. And the Bible says he finally just came to his senses, and he decided if I just go back to my dad's place, and if I just eat crow, I know I won't be his son anymore, but he'll for sure give me a job, and at least I'll have three square meals and a roof over my head. And then he decides to just go home and eat crow.

And have you ever gotten in trouble when you're a kid and you got to fess up to your parents, or maybe you got in trouble as a spouse, you got to fess up to your spouse, or something like this, and you're just rehearsing this speech in your head about what you're going to say when you see them. You're going over and over; you got the script memorized. Mom, I had this rock and I didn't mean to throw it, and I sure wasn't aiming for that window, but it got the window. Dad, I borrowed your car over the weekend. I took it to the mountains and your car doesn't exist anymore. This kind of thing. That almost happened to me.

He comes home and his rehearsed speech is like this: Father, I've sinned against heaven and earth. I am not worthy to be called your son. Make me a slave. You ever felt that way towards God? Just make me a servant. Make me one of your hired hands. As he's coming close to the house, probably crossed whatever mile marker, or maybe a river, his father sees him on the distance, and he's still saying this over, his father gets up, maybe he's sitting on the porch of the house, he runs out to his son and there's tears in his eyes. He thought his son was dead. He sees him, he's actually alive. Running to him, he hollers at everybody: he's here! He's here!

As the father comes closer, the son still awkwardly begins this rehearsed speech: father, I've sinned against heaven and earth. And it's like he doesn't even hear it. He throws his arms around his son and he tells the servants bring him a ring to put on his finger. Bring him a robe over his back, and put shoes on his feet. Do you know what that means? The ring is a symbol of power. You're a member of this family. The robe is a symbol of dignity and honor. And the shoes are a symbol of freedom. If you're a slave, you're barefoot. You put shoes on; people will know, you are free.

And that's what God offers us. He does not offer us some kind of servitude or slavery. We are either not home, or we are a child of God. We are either away, or we are lavished in grace, love, power, authority and freedom. It's one or the other. This is what the Lord offers us. And boy, does a party breakout. A huge party. Expensive party. The fatted calf. And there's music and dancing. It's one of the best days ever for this family and for this town.

And finally, that curmudgeon of an older brother comes home dirty from hard work and labor. He hears the music, he wonders what's going on, he asks one of the servants what is going on in there. And the servant says your brother; we all thought he was dead. He's alive! And now that he's come home, your father killed the fatted calf and is throwing a party for him. Come in and celebrate with us. And the brother, instead of going in, just shakes his head and mumbles something like no. And just goes back to working.

This then is a shame to the father in a second way because the fact that he's not at the party is in and of itself a scandal. So the father, when everybody's like why is the older brother not in, why is he still out there, runs out to his older brother, the same way he ran out to the younger brother. This older brother is a representation of religious people. This sort of stinginess with grace. This strictness, the judgement. So the father runs out to him and he says come celebrate, and the brother says this son of yours. Notice not my brother, but this son of yours disowned.

The Prodigal Father

Took our family's wealth and spent it on prostitutes. It's interesting he says prostitutes because they say resentment is not located in the part of your brain where anger is found. Resentment is where envy is. It never says that he spent the money on prostitutes. There's no way the older brother would know. What are we seeing? We're seeing what the brother really wants. We're seeing what he fantasizes about if HE were to do what his younger brother. He'd sell all of stuff and have a night on the town, I guess. And here's this moment you see that in his heart, the older brother is not actually doing what he wants to do, but he is white-knuckling his way into what he thinks of as goodness. And you wonder if there might be a little bit of death on the inside of the older brother.

And so the father says son, all that I have is yours! But this, and now he says brother of yours was dead, and now is alive. He was lost and now he's found. Won't you come in and celebrate with us. And you know what happens? We don't know. That's where this story ends. And the story ends with Jesus looking at this religious leaders with His hands out like this, offering them to come sit at the table with tax collectors and sinners. Do they sit? We don't know.

And that's the question for us religious people. Where will we sit? What's really happening in our heart? What do we really want from life? Do we want judgmental, angry, strict kind of envy filled life? Or can we become prodigal like the father where we become lavish, extravagant and wasteful with the kind of grace, love and friendship we offer people we don't always get along with. And that's the invitation to everybody. To come home to the Father.

Many of us, we just, whether we're religious or not, just find ourselves feeling lost. So much of it is honestly overthinking. So much of it is us spinning our wheels when the Father just says do you believe a little? How little. Do you believe just a little? How little. Just a little! How little? The size of a mustard seed. Do you believe that little? Give it to me and watch what I can do with it.

So that's the invitation to the Lord to you today. Maybe 99% of you says God would never love someone like me, but 1% of you says maybe. Maybe 99% of you says I don't believe in God. But 1% of you says maybe. Maybe 99% of you says I can never forgive God for X, Y and Z, but maybe 1% of you says maybe I can have a new life. I want you to give that 1% to God today, and watch what He can do with it. He can change your life forever. And that's what we testify to today. The resurrection, that anything that's dead in God's kingdom can be raised to new life. He will raise you to new life. Give Him your faith. He will heal you. Give Him your faith. Give Him your heart. Make a decision now to follow Him and you'll never be the same.

When I made a decision to follow Jesus, I didn't go down to an altar call, I didn't do anything special or weird, I just sat in a pew just like you are now, nobody knew, I just made a decision in my heart and I've never been the same. Try it. You'll be a different person. Give your life to Him and everything will change. Everything changes when you change.

So Father, we ask for that in Jesus' name to give us all that we need to become all what you've called us to be. We thank you, God that you gave your life on the cross for us, and that you offer us eternal life. I pray that every single person under the sound of my voice would receive that gift, afresh and anew today, in the strong name of Jesus we pray, all God's people said, amen.

Would you stand with me?

Benediction – Bobby Schuller

Thank you all for joining us today! Can we say thank you to these musicians and our production team for working so hard. What an awesome experience. Thank you.

This is our last service for the morning, so keeping in tradition, these plants here, which are all potted. You can plant them at home, you're free to take with you. We only ask that there be one per person, or two per family. Okay? And please don't rush down and don't come on the stage, we'll move the plants forward. We don't need anybody breaking a kneecap on Easter.

All right! 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.