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Love is Work

Hour of Power 24.12.2023

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: Happy Christmas week visitors and church family. We're so happy to be with you. The reason that God sent the extravagant gift of Jesus is because He so loves you, and we love you, too. Thank you for being here.

BS: Let's begin with a word of prayer. Thank you, Father, for inviting us into your house. We're so grateful for the good things that are in store for us. We believe this morning and trust in you and in the power of your ability to turn things around. Help us to become who we need to be for the people that love us today. 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 – Luke 2:8-20 – Hannah Schuller

You may be seated. In preparation for the message, Luke 2:8-20. And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests." When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told to them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told. Amen.

ADVENT CANDLE LIGHTING (Love) – Nguyen Family

MADELINÉ: During the first weeks of this Advent season, we lit the candles of hope, peace and joy. Today we light the candle of love. Jesus has shown us God's perfect love in human form. The Bible teaches us, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life."

EVELYN: Advent is a time of preparation, a time to think of others and for sharing life with all of God's children. It is a time to love others as God loved us and to give the world His most precious gift – God's good news, His Son Jesus Christ.

JOANNE: Let us pray these words together as a congregation: God of hope, Prince of peace, Provider of joy and the love of God, your goodness is beyond our comprehension. In the union of flesh and spirit, teach us to love this world and all people as you have loved us in Jesus Christ. Come into our darkness and reign. Open our hearts that we all might receive your transforming love. Amen.

DECLARATION – Bobby Schuller

Whoever you are, please stand with us. 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.

Love is Work

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. Thanks, you can be seated.

MESSAGE – Love is Work – Bobby Schuller

I am so grateful for our faith. We serve a God of second chances. Not just second chances, third chances. Not just third chances, you know how I'm going to be doing it. How many times should I forgive my neighbor? Seven times? No, says the Lord, seventy-seven times seven. What does that mean? Just keep going. Why does God say that? Because that is the same way that He forgives us. And think of forgiveness as second chances. You always have another day, another chance to become who you were called to be, but never forget the inward work happens before the outward results appear. As we get to the end of a year, it's a time in which many of us are thinking about our lives. We're thinking about our victories, we're thinking about our mistakes. Some of us are looking over our balance sheets and income statements in our businesses or doctor's offices and saying oh this was a good year! Or this was a bad year, or whatever. There's lots of reviews. People are thinking about their family as they're filling out their cards. They're thinking about their kids and their grandkids. And as you look at your own life, may I just say the best improvement you can make in your life is to follow Jesus. It sounds like a cliché, but if you want to grow as a person, you need the right teacher. And if you want to be at peace in life, you have to be at peace with God. Christ was crucified so that we could come boldly before God's throne a complete new creation. Now the luckiest thing, and I know we don't believe in luck, but I think one of the luckiest things that ever happened to me, it's not that I had great parents, and I did, it's not that I was born in America, and I'm grateful for that. It's not my family, it's not my close friends, it's not my church, it's not my health. The luckiest thing that ever happened to me is I came to know personally Jesus Christ and it has improved and affected every aspect of my life. Maybe you used to be in faith and you wandered, come back to the Lord. Maybe you never knew the Lord, make a decision today to follow Him. If you make that decision, I want you to text me the word HOPE to the number on the screen, and our staff will pray for you. We actually do it on Tuesday's and I hope you do that. Today, in Advent, we look at a word on each Sunday, and that's what each candle is for. Today's word is the big one – L-O-V-E. That's right, John Lennon, it's your Sunday. All you need is love, right? Today, we are looking at love. And when we think of love, most of the time we think about our dog licking our face in the morning. We think about our kids running to the door when we come home from work or visiting with friends. We think about our parents calling us to ask how our trip went. We think about the warm feeling of waking up to your spouse in bed with a hug or whatever. We think about these moments in life that we cherish with our good friends or our colleagues at work, or weddings, and these are a wonderful, amazing part of love. But what we don't think often when we think about love is the other side of the coin, and that is that love is work. Love is work. And the work, my friend, is a life sentence. Love is never owned, it's rented and the rent is due every day. And I hate to say now God's love is available all the time, whether you're the best or the worst, to saints and sinners alike, God loves everyone. And we should love everyone, too. But the key word there is 'should' because what we should do and what we do do are not always the same thing. But what I want you to think about today, though, is I want you to think about.. participate with me just for a moment here. Right here. I want you to think about the three, four or five most important people in your life. Think about them right now. Maybe it's your best friend, maybe it's your kids or your grandkids, your spouse, your brother, your sister, maybe it's a pet, maybe it's a parent, a grandparent, a mentor, think about this person right now in your mind. And now go even deeper, think about, I'm sure you have a good relationship with them in some way or you wouldn't have thought of them, but think about what they would really want or need from you. Think about who you could become for them. Maybe you're even doing this now.. close your eyes and just think about who could I become for them. It's weird, because when we think about love and the work that goes into love, one of the most troubling things about love is everybody loves a little bit different. Men and women tend to receive and give love in different ways. Kids and grownups tend to give and receive love in different ways. Cultures have different ways of giving and receiving love, and part of the work is learning how do these people really receive love from me. And what I want you to do today is to understand that the work you do on you is one of the most loving things you can do for other people. Sometimes it feels like oh if I have some time for myself, oh if I take fifteen minutes and go have a quiet time, if I go to a course, if I ask for help, that's me turning my back. But very often you've been giving enough in that way. Sometimes the people who love you need you to do the inner work, and that's exactly what it is.

Love is Work

Jesus tells us in John chapter 15 "greater love has no one than this than he lay down his life for his friends" or one's life for one's friends. Now that's interesting. That's interesting. Because we think of great love as an emotional thing, and it often is, but that emotional thing is only real love if it drives us to real change. Here's what Christian love really is like. Christian love is faithfulness. It's the kind of love that says you can count on me. In fact, it's so obvious that you don't even need to say it. They know it. Christian love is a kind of love that provides, but if you want to provide for the people that love you, you have to become a provider. Christian love means you show up, but in order to show up, you have to become a show-er-upper-er. That's in the dictionary. It requires effort. Love gets up at night, doesn't it? Love isn't embarrassed. Love even fights or defends sometimes. Love keeps going even when people push you away, because love cares, and love, most of all, if you write anything down, write this down: love becomes. Now when we become the people we want to be, we don't want to do it from a place of shame. We ought to know that we're not what we do, we're not what we have, and we're not what people say about us. We are treasured by God and we are value in and of ourselves. But one way we can build our lives in response to that is to say I have work I can do to be the best I can be, and I know that work is never owned – it's rented. That sounds taxing. It can sound exhausting, but the irony about this kind of work is unlike the work you might have at your job or other places. This is the kind of work that the more you do it, the more you like it. The more you work on you, the more you enjoy mornings and evenings. The more you work on you, the more loving people and showing up in the ways that you want to becomes, well, a lot easier. I think it's good to look at life and to look at the people who need you and say they need this person. I'm not that person but I can become that person. I believe that. To look in the mirror and say I believe I can become anyone God calls me to be by doing the daily work and practicing the daily disciplines. This sort of ready-fire-aim approach to life has been something I've done a lot in life. I was not ready to be a husband when I became a 21-year-old husband. You know that? Is that a surprise? Twenty-one used to be not so young to get married. That's like children being married today, it feels like. Actually Hannah and I this May will celebrate 20 years of marriage. Isn't that amazing? Now that's good, yeah! We can clap to that. Now was I ready? No, I had to become a husband. I had to move from being a frat boy to being a husband. You got to do that. I was a still frat boy when I said I do, but in the outside I made a commitment, and on the inside I had to turn into that man, and I'm so glad I did. When I became a father, I was not ready to be a father. Most parents are not. There's something that breaks in you the ninth time you have to get up in the middle of the night to rock a baby with colic back to sleep. You have to become a father, or you have to become a mother. Your body, especially if you're a mother, your body physically changes, but there's even something else that spiritually changes in your heart and mind where you know that to love this baby, I can't be that young man anymore. I have to become a new kind of man or a new kind of woman. And I'm willing to read the books, I'm willing to call my parents and grandparents, I'm willing to ask my neighbor, I'm willing to ask my spouse 'how can I become better for the people that need me.' I still remember when my grandfather, Dr. Schuller, who founded this church, was dying, and I was visiting him in the hospital. I remember he was laying there one day and I was just sitting there in a chair next to his bed, just reading a book or something, and he woke up. He shot up out of bed, and he looks at me and he says "Bobby!" I said "Hey grandpa." He goes, "My grandson!" I said "hi, grandpa." He goes, "I love your haircut!" And then he went right back to sleep. Okay. That's a fun story. But you know I think my grandfather needed someone to carry on the work he started, and I still remember when I came to the helm of this church ten years ago, someone with us who I love who was one of my colleagues, he said 'you are in over your head.' And I thought he is right. And I scratched my head and my response was, 'well, at least I can swim.' And that's a good approach. To get in over your head, knowing you can swim; knowing you can read the books; knowing that the best way to learn anything is by simply doing it. To make a choice that if people in my life need me to love them, the best thing I can do is work on me. I'll become the person I need to be for you. You become the person you need to be for me. If we all had that approach in life, a lot more love would be going around because we wouldn't be trying harder all the time, it would come out naturally from the gifting's that are being given to us through the Holy Spirit. I still remember.. this is not an encouragement to you. I still remember a friend of mine Glenn, a businessman, who at the time was not a Christian at all, but he came out to Orange Country from the East Coast somewhere, was homeless. I mean he was like in his early 20's, but he saw all the amazing things in Orange County – the big houses and boats, and he said I want to be able to get one of those boats. I want to be able to get one of those houses. So he just didn't go back.

Love is Work

His friend went back, and he convinced some owner of a Mexican restaurant to let him wash dishes, get minimum wage, and sleep in the janitorial closet, which he did for a while. And he went around meeting people and finally he met a guy, got to know him and later this guy came back to him and said hey I'm starting a mortgage company in a month. Can you help me? And he said I can help you build one of the best mortgage companies in the world. And they said great. They shook hands, the guy left, and he said I didn't know what a mortgage was. So he went down.. this was a while ago, he went down to the library, because there was no internet back then, and for a month just poured over mortgage, mortgage businesses, how they work, and believe it or not, he rose to the occasion and they created a gigantic mortgage company. Now I'm not saying that you should emulate that; it's a little too deceptive for me, but it is interesting, isn't it, how sometimes when we're caught up in these relationships, we're called to simply become on the inside what we're pretending to be on the outside. And I can tell you, when I was a dad, I was pretending at first. When I was a husband, in many ways, I was pretending. I needed to grow as a person. And that growing, that's the thing of life, isn't it. Isn't that the thing of life? To get to the end of a year and say I'm a bigger person than I was a year ago. To get to the end of a season and say I'm so glad that I've not been perfect, nobody is, but I've taken seriously the effort that needs to go in to love. And there is effort and there is work. If you have love in your life, you know what I'm saying is true. I remember the story Ed Mylett told of his alcoholic father who became his hero. He had this father who was so loving, but struggled with drinking. And that is how so many relationships are. Many of you had parents with maybe mental illness or substance abuse issues, and they were two different people. And he said that's how my dad was. He was a doctor, a Jekyll and a Mr. Hyde. And I didn't know who I was going to get – the loving amazing father that would play catch with me and hug me, or the alcoholic father who was absent and mean spirited. And he said I got to understand the little ticks and things. And I remember one of the biggest tells was when he got home if the key went into the lock easily, I knew he was my great dad. And if it took a while and it was hard, he knew that he was drunk and he needed to disappear. One day, Ed's dad got an ultimatum from Ed's mom. She said you have one more chance. One more chance to get this right, or you're gone forever. His dad came to him and said, son, you need to know something. I know you know I've been struggling with drinking. I'm going to leave for a while, but when I come back, I'm going to become the dad you need. He said to his dad how do I know this time it's true? And he said because I have one more chance. And he did. He came back and he became the father his son needed. He became a sober father. See he had everything right except that – he just needed to be sober. And many people can't do that, but the way he did it was not by getting some big difficult thing – I will be sober for the rest of my life – his mantra was I'll be sober for one more day. And he did one more day for 40 more years and became the father Ed needed. Stop thinking I need to become this, I need to become that, just say each day at a time, one day at a time, I'll become the father, the mother, the grandmother, the grandfather, the friend, the colleague, the parent, the pet owner that my pets need, that my friends need. Whatever it is. And yes, God does care about your dog, and He does care about your cat, and maybe even your fish and your bird. He cares about the people in your life, and that's why God gives us rules around His creatures is because He loves them all. And so we become the caretakers and the people that they need. The world says life is about winning and losing, and that's almost true, but it's wrong. Life is not about winning and losing. Life is about growing or dying. Let's let that sit for a second. If you write anything down, that's it. Life is not about winning or losing, life is about growing or dying. And the more you grow, the more you win, and the more you die, the more you'll lose. But if we focus on growing, on becoming who we're called to be, everything else changes. So do the hard work to focus on you every single day. You want to know how to invest your money in this crazy market? I got a great investment opportunity for you. You ready? It's not crypto, it's not Trump NFT's, did you hear about that? It's not gold, it's not stocks and bonds. You ready? What else could it be? It's not real estate, it's you. That's what Uncle Warren taught us, Warren Buffet. The best investment you can make, whether it's financial or of your time, is to invest in you, because when you grow in knowledge and experience, it can't be inflated away, it can't be stolen. As Jesus said, moth and rust cannot destroy. They can take your diploma, but they can't take your education. They can take your job, but they can't take your experience. If you continue to grow as a person and do the work of you, you'll never be the same. And no one can take that from you. Wow! That's called an eternal treasure. I want more of those, how about you? Finally, that brings us to the story that Hannah so beautifully read this morning, the story of the revelation and announcement that the Messiah had been born.

Love is Work

Now it doesn't say this in the Bible, but I've got some inside information that just before that happened, there was a corporate meeting in heaven, did you know that? There was this meeting. And all of the angels got around the throne of God, and God sat down, and they all met together, and they were doing their plan, and they said okay, Jesus just went down there, He's a baby now. They said He's a what? Well you know Jesus, the second person of the trinity, He's a baby now. And we need to tell everybody. Okay, so God says we need to tell everybody. Who are we going to send? Gabriel or Michael? I think we'll send.. was it Gabriel? I actually don't know. I don't think it says. Tradition thinks its Gabriel. We're going to send Gabriel. Okay, I'll go. And then they say let's not tell everybody, let's tell somebody and we'll let them tell everybody. They said oh that's a good idea. Who should we tell? Somebody said let's tell that famous rabbi. And they said no not him, he's too into himself. They're like oh okay. Well let's tell the priests, right? There's like thousands of them. Surely we can find a priest. They said no, not the priests. All they want to do is hang out at the temple. We need somebody over in Bethlehem. So they're scratching their heads, and finally they say okay; this is true. It's not in the Bible, but this is.. we'll tell who? God says I know who you should tell. You see those 16/17-year-old teenage girls? This is exactly who they would have been. With that 10/11-year-old boy down there. They're called shepherds. Now we always think shepherds are old sages with big beards. Those men did not do that kind of work. It was always, and it still is today if you go to the Middle East, it's always teenage girls and little boys. So ten-year-old boys like King David, or teenage girls like Rachel, Rebecca, Leah, Zipporah in the Bible. Young women. Go tell those teenage kids, and they'll tell everybody because they got the energy, and they're shepherds, and look at them, they're shepherds. They're faithful. They do the work. And that's what happened. Now everything before this, I just kind of made up. But this part is true. The angels showed up and they told the shepherds, and the shepherds received this amazing message, went to Bethlehem, said the Messiah has been born, and then went around and told everybody. The Messiah's been born. Now here's a great question, and it's a good one: why did God choose shepherds? Why? Why did He choose them? I have my own theory. I think there's two things we learn from this. Here's the first thing we learn. Number one: shepherds are humble, faithful workers. Everybody say workers. God will not anoint a lazy person. This is what David Diga Hernandez said – He can deal with your sin, He can deal with your troubles, He can deal with even mental illness, He can deal with substance abuse. He cannot deal with a lazy person. And a lazy person is not a person who is resting. A lazy person is someone who has checked out from life. There is someone with a will to failure and a will to stay. These are people who had a will to go and to do, and you can become like this person. Here's the key to growth. The key to growth is humility. And that's exactly what these kids, these shepherds exhibited. The key to growth is to remain hungry. To remain curious. To remain unoffendable. To not be easily embarrassed. Too often we think about a humble heart. We think about someone who's ashamed, but actually people who live with deep shame, usually that they got when they were kids, can't really be humble people because any type of feedback or learning you hear, you take personally, and you just react. And if that's you, I understand. It's hard. It looks like this. The difference between shame and humility. If you say to someone who's struggling with shame, something like here's something I think you could learn, all they hear is you're stupid. If you say hey I got a great idea for a haircut, all they hear is you're ugly. If you say hey I've got this new method that could make you even healthier, all they hear is you're fat. If you say hey, I've got an idea for your business, all they hear is you're a failure. If you say hey, I've got this great idea on how to raise a great son or a great daughter, all they hear is you're a bad parent. If you say I've got a great opportunity available for you, all they hear is you're lazy. And maybe you resonate with this sometimes when you were just not in a good place, and some way to grow, some way to improve comes before you. If you struggle with shame, you can't hear it. But if you have a humble heart, if you're not worried about what people think about you, if you find your identity in Jesus Christ, knowing that He loves you just as you are, not as you should be, you can take those bits of feedback and you say they're wrong. I like my haircut. Of you can look in the mirror and go whoa! She's right! Time to go to the barber. You can take it as it comes, you see? You can take it objectively, and that is the power of a humble heart. It's a heart that wants to hear those things, even if it stings a little bit, I'm ready to learn. It's important that we respect ourselves. It's good to respect yourself in the way that you dress, in the company you keep, in the words you use, but don't take yourself too seriously. If you're very, very serious, always having the disposition of an eagle, as the Romans used to say, it's going to be very hard for you to grow, to learn, and most of all, become the kinds of people the people in your life need.

Love is Work

It's simply this: to lay down your life for your friends, Jesus tells us, is to commit ourselves to the daily disciplines, the little things. The same way a farmer commits himself to the land by doing little things to care for the seed, plant the seeds in your life and care for them, and in due time, you'll reap a humungous harvest. The Bible does not say you will reap what you sow. The Bible says you will reap 30/60/100 times what you sow, and this is important. The seeds you're planting today are a good indicator of your future. So plant those seeds, care for them, and you will reap a good crop in your life in all the ways that matter. Here's a popular way for the world to think now a-days, and if you're in a company of people that think this way a lot, exit. It's going to harm your life. Here's an attitude that people have today: what does the world owe me? What does my boss owe me? What does my family owe me? What does my country owe me? What does my church owe me? Here's a better question to ask: what do I owe my family? When I signed up for this, having kids or being married, what did I sign up for? What do they need from me? What do my parents need from me? What do my grandparents need from me? Here's a great question: what does the world need from me? If I want to make a difference, who can I become that I meet a need that the world has. Who does my church need from me? Who do my colleagues at work need me to be? Who does my boss need me to be? I will become that and more, and you can. It doesn't happen in one day; it happens in many days stacked upon each other. You can become anything you want to be if you're willing to do the work. It's something artists know, it's something workers know, it's something you know. You put in the work; you'll see the fruit. Okay, so that's the first thing we learn from the shepherds – be humble. Here's the second thing: don't be so humble that you don't actually go to Bethlehem. Did you hear me, friends? It's easy to be so humble, to be so in your head, to be so writing and thinking and trying to solve everything that it's so easy to just stay out in the fields and never go to the thing. God did not call a priest, a rabbi or anybody like that to go to Bethlehem, He called teenagers, lowly shepherds to go and do the thing. The opportunity comes, go and do it, and be prepared. The Bible says faith pleases God. You want to please God? Step out of the boat and walk on water. You want to please God? Reach out and pray for someone. You want to please God? Take a leap. During Advent, if we had one word to describe Advent, the word would be prepare. So what do we do? We prepare and we get ready for when the door opens to leap through it. It's good to think – I'm a thinker. We ought to think, we ought to love the Lord with our mind as the Bible says. But don't overthink. Think, but don't overthink. You're only going to be able.. if you're a genius, you'll be able to figure out about seventy percent. If you're not a genius like me, you'll be able to figure maybe 40-50%. And then a lot of it you're going to get wrong. So eventually you got to just go to Bethlehem. You got to just take a shot. And even if you lose, you'll look back usually and say I'm glad I acted in faith. Don't be so humble you don't actually do the work. You don't actually say the thing. You don't actually call the person. Call the person. Write the letter. Pray the prayer. Go to the thing. And keep doing it and keep investing in you. Many people, they look around they go wow, he is so lucky. Wow, she is so lucky. My colleague is so lucky. And of course we don't believe in luck, but there is something about luck that everybody hates to admit seems to be swirling around in the world. I remember a reporter from the Los Angeles Times was interviewing me, and before we began I said, are you a religious person at all? She said no, actually I'm a.. she used the phrase committed atheist. I don't know what that means, but she said I'm a committed atheist. I thought committed atheist? Whoa. I hope this interview goes okay. I said well.. and I love to ask this question of atheists: do you believe in luck? And she said oh yes, I do believe in luck. Every time I go through an intersection, I circumflex. I thought okay. I don't know. If you go to Vegas, you'll see plenty of atheists doing things like knocking on wood and betting on lucky numbers. So the most, whatever, scientific or whatever, least religious minds of us still have this nagging sense that there's luck. And this is an old thing going way back. The Roman philosopher Seneca said this about luck. Pay attention. He said "luck is what happens when preparation meets opportunity." The opportunity is hard to drum up, but preparation is not. Luck is what happens when preparation meets opportunity. So prepare. Prepare. Get ready. Learn the skills. Develop the language things. Improve the friendships. Become a better version of everything you want to be, and look to Christ to make you into that person. You want to love your neighbor? Become the best neighbor ever. That's it. It's that simple. Become the kind of person that say I'm so glad that she's my wife. I'm so glad he's my husband. I'm so glad they're my friend. I'm so glad that as a Dalmatian I have an owner like that, or whatever it is. I was pretending to be a dog in that one. But become the best neighbor that the people in your life need. We thank you, Lord that your presence is here, that it never left us, and it will never leave us.

Love is Work

We receive with joy your Holy Spirit that fills our bodies, and we ask God that you would help our minds and hearts and even bodies to come in line with your word, to become who you've called us to be. We love you, God, it's in Jesus' name we pray, all God's people said, amen.

BENEDICTION – Bobby Schuller

I want to encourage you to come out Christmas Eve. We have worship services. We always have tons of people here because we're like a great Christmas church. My daughter calls us a fancy church and fancy churches tend to shine on Christmas so anyway, bring your friends. It's a 45-minute service, so if you've got kids, it's pretty easy to get through. My sermon will only be ten minutes, which is about how long this benediction is. So thank you for coming. 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.