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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.
HS: Merry Christmas, church family. Unto us a Savior was born, and we love celebrating that with you, so thank you for being here today. We love you. You know today I felt I was supposed to tell you that God is with you. It doesn't matter if you feel like you're a mess up, or you're not holy enough. If you have asked Him to be your Lord, He is with you. Discouragement does not come from God. God brings life and He is with you right now.
BS: That's a good word, amen. Let's pray together: Father, we thank you and love you. Thank you, God that you love us just as we are, not as we should be. That we're here because you've invited us as our dad to your house. And so Lord, we receive that response and we come here to be with you, Lord. I pray for everyone who's carrying a heavy burden today, that you would lift those burdens so that Christmas can be a time of celebration and joy. Lord, we're so excited about the birth of Jesus Christ, and we pray that your light would continue to break through in our darkness. Lord, we love you; it's in Jesus' name we pray, amen.
HS: Turn around and shake the hand of the person next to you and say God loves you and Merry Christmas, and so do I.

SCRIPTURE – Luke 1:30-38 – Hannah Schuller

In preparation for Bobby's message, the words of our Lord found in Luke 1:30: But the angel said to her do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call Him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the son of the most high. The Lord God will give Him the throne of His father, David, and He will reign over Jacob's descendants forever. His kingdom will never end.
How will this be, Mary asked the angel, since I am a virgin. The angel answered, the Holy Spirit will come on you and the power of the most high will overshadow you, so the holy one to be born will be called the son of God. Even Elizabeth, your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her 6th month. For no word from God will ever fail. I am the Lord's servant, Mary answered. May your word to me be fulfilled. Then the angel left her.
Church family, God's version of our dreams are far superior to our version. May we stay open and hold our dreams loosely. Amen.

DECLARATION – Bobby Schuller

Well one thing we do every single week is we say this creed together. We 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. Amen!

MESSAGE – Bobby Schuller "Openness: Hold Your Dream Loosely"

Today I'm finishing essentially a four part essay, or a four part series that I've been speaking on through the whole of advent, and I just want to review the first three Sunday's of advent, what we talked about, because they inform what we're going to talk about today. The first Sunday we talked about the importance of dreams, especially for the soul. Most of us have had a season in our life where we had a big dream in our heart, something we were pursuing, or we had no dream at all. And most of us would say yes, the time when we had the dream, it felt better. And during that Sunday, we talked about the importance of having very big dreams; God sized dreams.

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That when we build our dreams bigger than we think we can attain, they cause us to stretch, to evolve, to grow in ways that are even sometimes uncomfortable, and that's a very good thing. One thing I mentioned is that the other thing is that big dreams take the same amount of effort as little dreams. That's something I've learned as I've been a leader for awhile that having really big goals and having little goals, it means, the big goals mean you have to have more people in your life, but I've recognized that the big goals actually a lot of times don't take any more work, and sometimes take less work. I've been a pastor of a very small church, and now a pastor of a very large church and ministry, and I can tell you being a pastor of a small church is harder. And this is what people don't understand. When you're the pastor of a small church, you do everything. You're the accountant.. I was the accountant, the children's pastor, the worship leader, the sermon writer, the everything. And to add insult to injury, everybody used to joke about how I hardly worked and all I did was golf all the time. And I used to think I never golf! What are you even talking about? I can't afford to golf! I don't have any money! I don't have any time!

And what I've found is that when you have a big dream, it's easier to get partners, it's easier to get investors. People talk about it. People brag about it. And then even more so, if you come short of your huge goal, but you still achieve a lot, you probably far surpassed the small goal that you originally had. So this is important.

Actually recently I was talking to an architect, just to dream about what a Cathedral or a bigger church could look like for us someday, and I looked across the table and I said this church is not expensive enough. And he said what? In all of my designing, I've never heard a pastor say that. And I said you don't understand. My grandfather built a 30,000 square foot glass cathedral, and my father built a 360-acre retreat center in the most expensive part of Orange County. I can't build a small little church! Just kidding, I didn't say that.

No what I.. no, no, I didn't say that. What I actually said was you don't understand, I can't raise money for a small church. There are just not enough people that want to give to a small church. If I want to raise money for a church, it's got to be amazing. It's got to be the biggest, awesome-ist church anyone's ever seen. The bigger and more awesome it is, the easier it's going to be to build. And he just was blow.. and I looked to Russ and Russ was like yes, I think that's right.

And that's true. That's been our experience. Mediocre goals, mediocre dreams, it's so hard to find partners, so hard to find donors, so hard to find investors, so hard to get a call back. Big dreams, that's something that gets people's attention. So if you want to do something, do something big. Do something God sized, that way God can orchestrate and open the doors for you. So that's number one. Number two: every dream you have comes with a cost. You can't expect other people to fulfill your dream for you. You have to work for it. You have to go the extra mile. And you have to be willing to pay the price to see it to the end, to finish it. And that's something that a lot of people forget. They get to the eleventh hour and quit, but not you. That's not who you are.

And I also in that Sunday talked about the importance of what Taleb has called anti-fragile, or anti-fragility. That the opposite of fragile is that the things that harm you, they're actually good for you. If you're going to do things for God, if you're going to speak things out, if you're going to believe things, if you're going to proclaim dreams, the enemy is going to come after you, people are going to criticize you and judge you, and you have to be willing to accept that. Jesus actually told us blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you. Blessed are you. Why? Because that's what people do to dreamers. That's what people do to godly men and women. So you have to be willing to pay the price of your ego, you have to be able to pay the price that some people might turn their backs on you, or gossip about you, or whatever, and especially when you fall, and you will fall on your way to your big dream. You're going to have multiple bumps in the road, setbacks, and those are the times when people are really going to get you. And you just have to realize that all of that is so good for you. That the way to kill a Christian is to keep him safe and comfortable and well fed. That Christians are anti-fragile, so the way we grow is when we're hurt, persecuted and etc.

And finally number three, every big dream requires time and patience and humility. But most of all, patience. This is where we talked about how everything God makes is unhurried and unstoppable. So I pointed to nature, for example. I talked about a new constructed home that had been abandoned for two years, and was totally overrun with animals and plants and everything, and it would have been impossible to watch that happen in real time. But you think just two years, this new home is just now worthless because nature has totally grown through it.

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And that's how God moves. That you don't always see God moving but His pace is unhurried, but it's also unstoppable. It works its way through cracks, it breaks its way through things, and the enemy is the opposite. The enemy is like a microwave: everything has to happen right instantly and perfectly, but it's still disgusting. I'm talking about microwave food, by the way, in case.. Keep up. Just kidding. Just kidding.

No, so God works in a very unhurried, unhurried and unstoppable way, and so if you're going to do things with the Lord, if you're going to pursue God's dream in your life, or follow Jesus and take up your cross and follow Him, you walk with God at a walking pace, and you can't lead the Lord, you have to follow Him and its maddening because God works at an unhurried pace.

All right, we all caught up? So we talked about having big dreams, we talked about anti-fragility and the cost of taking up your cross, and finally talked about patience. And today, and this is the last thing, this is so important, is that you hold your dream loosely. You hold it, but you hold it with open hands, not with clenched fists.

Today I also want to talk about the danger of expectations, especially when you put expectations on others and how much of a burden that is on others, and how much that harms intimacy and love. And we'll just go on from there.

So first, I just want to encourage you to hold your dream loosely because God's version of your dream is better than your version of your dream. I heard this great story, it has to be apocryphal, it's too good. I mean apparently there was a pro golfer who was invited by a Saudi prince like ten years back to go golfing somewhere in Emirates, and so he flies out on the Saudi's private jet. And they're golfing for days, and they just hit it off. They're having a great time, they're out there all day, and they're laughing and joking, and even though this guy is from LA and the prince is from the Middle East, and they're from different religions and cultures and everything, they just hit it off. It's like they'd been best friends forever; had a great time. And it was this amazing trip.

And finally at the end the Saudi prince is walking slowly side by side with this pro golfer back to the private jet, and this pro golfer's mind is blown. He just had an amazing time.

And the Saudi prince puts his hand on his shoulders and looks at him and says, this weekend was too amazing. I want to buy you a gift to commemorate our great time together. And the guy's thinking this was a gift. I don't need anything. No, no, don't give me a gift. And the prince insists please, let me buy you something. And he says all right, buy me a commemorative golf club or something. Just buy me a golf club, and he says done, I'll do it.

And so they part, and the guy gets on the jet and as he's flying away, he's wondering well what kind of golf club do you get from a Saudi prince? Is this going to be like a solid gold driver, or like a diamond encrusted putter or something like this. And he's really looking forward to seeing what this gift is. And so finally a couple weeks go by and then a month or two goes by, and he's thinking I wonder if he forgot. Did he forget about me? And one day a driver appears, knocks on his door and he's holding a small package in his hand, and it doesn't look like a club, and he hands him this package and he opens it and inside is a title deed to a country club. A golf club. He bought him a golf club. Isn't that amazing? All right, I'll buy you a club.

And I love that story because kings see things different than everybody else does. Kings hear requests in different ways than everybody else does or do. And when I hear this story, I think we serve the King of kings. And we ask Him for a golf club, He gives us a golf club. And that's what it's like serving the Lord is that, and this, again, I'll say it again, God's version of your dream is better than your version of your dream. Amen! Thank you. God's version of your dream is so wonderful and so brilliant, sometimes I wonder if He lets us settle for the smaller version, just so He can build our faith in the process.

This is important because when we have dreams in our heart, we have to remember to hold them loosely because sometimes God will remove the smaller dream to replace it with a bigger version of that dream: a 2.0, a 3.0 version of your dream. Very common for the Lord to do this in the life of a disciple. To at the moment where you think you've lost everything, you've only lost the smaller version to attain the bigger version. And I think that maybe God is doing that in some of your lives today. You're discouraged but be encouraged. That that's a part of God getting you to where you truly need to be. See He's getting the right kind of club in your hands.

And this is what I see when I read the famous story in Luke chapter 1 about the virgin Mary, when I try to look at it through first century eyes, I see a story that should be very scary, but you don't see it in the pages. And Hannah read it earlier, so I won't read it word for word, but I'll go through the story. And it basically looks like this. There's this teenage girl, Mary. We don't know how old she is.

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We'll assume she's 16 or 17, something like that. Most Bible scholars.. that's about the time when a girl got engaged or got married. And now Mary is like many teenage girls, she is in love, infatuated, excited, and she is a bride to be. She is engaged to probably the most eligible bachelor in Nazareth, and the reason I know this is the scripture tells us that Joseph, that hot Joseph. Oh my gosh, who is going to marry Joseph. Mary, of course it's her. There were girls saying that. It's in the gospel according to Robert. It's a different so girls were like.. Mary, he picked Mary.

So Joseph is a very eligible bachelor, and the reason we know this is because he's a direct descendant of King David. Now we see that Matthew points that out clearly, but this is important. We sometimes think Joseph is like a secret or something. It's not. Everybody knows Joseph should be the king of Israel. And this is super important because the context of the day is they're occupied by the evil Roman Empire. And then the Roman Empire has placed this fake puppet king, who is also very pagan and evil and Greek, and all the things that Jews hate, and his name is Herod. And so Herod is this fake puppet king, but they're like no, we want to get rid of Herod, we want to get rid of the Romans, and we want someone from the kingly line of David to be king. And so that guy is Joseph, and this is important.

So Mary is engaged to Joseph. Now pile on top of that that they live in what we commonly today refer to as a face culture. So many cultures today are still face cultures. The Middle East is this way. Many part of China, Japan, they have this face culture where there's a lot of attention is paid to manners, the way in which things are supposed to be done, tradition, and it's a very, very big deal when some of these things are broken. They bring shame, not only on you, but on your whole family. And so here is Mary in this face culture that is receiving one of the most exciting things for a teenage girl: getting married. And exciting for her family: she's marrying a Davidian. She's marrying Joseph who is a direct descendant of King David. So this is very exciting for their families, a very big deal. She's got a lot of pressure on her to do everything right. And she has this dream.

This dream of building a family! Of being married and having lots of children, and her children will carry on the bloodline of King David. I mean this is interesting.

And so just before her wedding. Everybody here seen the show or heard of this phrase "bridezilla?" What you see are young girls who are about to get married that freak out over the smallest, stupidest things, right? Something very big is about to happen according to her wedding plans, and she doesn't see it coming. Gabriel shows up and says Mary, you're going to have a baby, even though you're a virgin, and the baby is going to be the Son of God, the coming of the Messiah. As an aside theologically, the reason Christians think this is important is because of the doctrine of original sin. It passes through the father, through the descendants of Adam, and so Jesus not being born as a descendant of Adam, but through the father that His father is God, so He doesn't inherit original sin. This was why Christians make a big deal at this.

Anyway, but think about that. Here's this girl and everything's going perfect in her life, and everything's amazing and all of her dreams are true, she couldn't have designed anything better, and then now all of a sudden she's going to be pregnant and she has to tell her family, and she has to tell Joseph, and is she going to even try and convince them that she's still a virgin even though it's true?

And you would think all of this would be going through her head, and maybe it is. But in the end, she says I am the Lord's servant. Now it's interesting, I like to think she's excited. She certainly is a little bit later when she sings the Magnificat, but I don't know if she.. I mean I don't know if she is. But she trusts. She trusts the Lord. She trusts that no matter what, God will sort this out, even if she might be disowned by her family, which would have been totally normal. She might be homeless, which could be normal for a single mom back then. Remember women back then oftentimes were viewed culturally as property. So the disobedience itself is a way of saying. So this is very bad for her.

And incidentally, of course, we see though that God works it out and that an angel appears to Joseph, who says that he's going to leave her quietly so that it's not a shame on her family, etc., which I think really speaks to his character. I would be hurt if I was Joseph. But he's going to do it quietly. But then the angel appears to him and gives him the scoop.

But all of it to simply say that Mary's dream was a dream for a family, to have a son that was in the line of David, to marry Joseph, and God's version of that dream was much better. She wanted a kingly family, and He wanted the holy family, is what we call it today. And this is amazing that God, in the moment when Mary thought she was maybe losing everything, God was providing a dream that was amazing, that was far more than anyone would have ever imagined.

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And this just reinforces my point to you today, friend. God's version of your dream is better than your version of your dream. There's only one thing to do when tragedy strikes, when setbacks happen, when we get bad news in our business or our relationships, is to simply look to heaven and say I trust the Lord! No matter how hard it gets, no matter how bad the wind blows or how bad things become, you just say I trust you, Lord. Lord, I trust you. That you love me more than I love myself. That when I'm in your will, things go better. And trust the Lord. Trust Him. His version of your dream is better than your version of your dream. He's going to get you there. That's a promise, amen?

That's what we learn from Mary is that kind of faith pleases God. He just loves that kind of faith. It's the kind of trust that you say no matter what happens, I just believe God will see it through.

So if you're holding a dream today, and you've been holding it for a long time, hold that dream loosely. Hold it loosely. Hold it with open hands, not clenched fists. And if it has to, allow the Lord to take it from you to replace it with a better version.

I think that when we create goals or we have dreams in our heart that those dreams should be in a way plastic. Do you know what I mean by that? Not plastic like made of plastic, but small wonder. Anybody? It's a very small number of people get that joke. It's again.. she's fantastic, made of plastic, microchips here and there. No, all right. It's a sit com from like '86. Doesn't matter.

When I say that your goals and your dreams should be plastic, I mean that they're formable, moldable, loose; that they're changeable but they still take on a shape.

When I was in high school, I loved clay. So there was a season where I really was in all manner of art and I tried different arts and things, but because I wasn't great at it, the thing I loved the most was clay because if you messed up, you could fix it. Clay always stayed moldable as long as it stayed wet. And if it started to dry and you were working on it maybe for a couple hours, you'd begin to see cracks sort of form sometime, little fissures form in the clay, but that was easy to repair by simply just adding water, kind of massaging it or bringing in a little extra clay.

And if something fell off, you could always put it back on. This is why stone work was always so impressive to me. One little mistake and it's all over. It's like not that way.

So I loved to make things out of clay, and I actually won a contest in third grade. I made this very creepy looking Tim Burton style dragon on purpose, very weird looking and I used shoe polish – I soaked it in shoe polish so that it would take on that obelisk black kind of look after it was baked. And I won first place in the Orange County Art contest, which was very cool for me as a kid. But anyway, when we were class, you could always mold and change this thing, even if you hated it, you could just stomp it and start over, which is also fun to do when you got angry. And the thing was, the thing continued to be shapeable as long as you didn't bake it. You see the students weren't allowed to bake the things they made. Only the teachers could bake the things they made. And the thing wasn't set until it was baked.

I think this is how it should be with our dreams. That we keep our dreams plastic; we keep them wet, we keep them moldable, that we craft our goals with wet clay. And that we as students of Jesus cannot bake our things. Only the Lord can bake them. Only the Lord can finish them. We simply keep shaping and forming, and we let God do the finishing. We let God do the baking. Amen? Craft your goals with wet clay. Let God do the baking.

Beware in all of your crafting and making and doing, beware expectations. I'm very troubled by the amount of pastors that love to preach on having great expectations, and they're not talking about the novel. They're talking about expectations on God, expectations from church, expectations from your family. I'm troubled by that. I think that expectations are unfair, actually and they don't come from a humble heart. But it's a humble heart that the Lord loves.

Very often we confuse, and I think this is what most pastors are trying to get at. We confuse expectations with desire. I think desire is great. I have a lot of desire, don't I Hannah? I am an obsessive, driven person with lots of the big, big desires. But I've learned that there's a difference between that and expectation. Expectation means my desire must be fulfilled; desire is merely just wanting something. And this is so important that you understand morally the difference in the life of a believer, that expectations, especially when.. listen, those who have ears to hear, especially when we put those expectations on people. It's unkind and unfair.

Expectations. Desiring things of people is one thing, and we ought to have them, but expecting things from people is unkind and unfair. This happens a lot with roommates, and this happens a lot in marriages. Very often roommates and spouses don't want to do a certain household job too many times because it just might become an expectation. They want to do it just enough that they get thanked, but if they do it every day, it becomes their new job. And it becomes a what – an expectation.

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That one day they don't do it, instead of getting a thank you the other days, they get a 'why didn't you do it today?' And so what we're doing is nurturing, in our relationships, a desire to do just enough so it doesn't become an expectation.

And this is what young people, in particular, have to learn. All of these expectations, which oftentimes crystallize into entitlement, that the world owes me something, that people owe me something, everybody owes me something, it's just such an unhealthy place to be. It's unkind to your neighbor and unfair. That instead of saying 'what does the world owe me,' the question we should all be asking is 'what do I owe the world?' Instead of saying 'what does my spouse owe me,' we ought to say 'what do I owe my spouse?' Instead of saying 'what does my roommate owe me,' ask yourself 'what do you owe your roommate?' How do you be better where you're not putting expectations on people.

This is so important because this is a part of holding our goals and dreams loosely. Your dreams for your family, your dreams for your Christmas, your dreams for your marriage, your dreams for your work. In those desires and in those dreams, if you don't hold them loosely, you're going to be placing unfair expectations on other people, and that will crystallize into resentment, and you'll push people away rather than drawing them closer. You don't want to do that.

When it goes to the extreme version, becomes a procrustean bed. You guys know the term procrustes? Procrustes was a famous villain in the Greek mythology in the fairy tale. There was this thing called the Sacred Way between Athens and Eleusis. It was a very arduous journey through the mountains. And at the top of a mountain, there was a guy named Procrustes - can't say it. At the top of the mountain there was a man named Procrustes. And Procrustes would draw people into his inn to sleep and to rest. And the Procrustean bed was this thing where when you came in, nobody fit the bed. And so what he would do is if you were too short, he would stretch you out, elongate you so you'd fit the bed, and if you were too tall, he would chop your legs off so that you'd fit.

Fairy tales used to be a lot more interesting. Kids need fairy tales like this, guys. They need this stuff. They really do.

So Procrustes would cut people or stretch people and torture them in his own sadistic way in an attempt to help them. So in an attempt to be hospitable, instead of changing the bed, he always wants to change the person. And this phrase is used a lot when we look at things like government, we look at things like education, we look at things like the way we treat people, the church has done things like this in the past where we try and make every individual fit a certain mold. And what happens in our organizations as leaders, as business owners, as moms and dads, grandmas and grandpas, when we put expectations on our people, are we in our attempt to help people, harming them?! Are we asking people, are we destroying something special in the lives of the people we love when we try and stretch them or cut their legs off to make them fit a bed that we have constructed ourselves? Are we doing that? And sometimes we are, and we don't see it. We get angry then when they resent the fact that we chop their legs off.

All of you are thinking of someone else who does this. See that's the thing. It's always someone else: it's your mother-in-law or something. My mother-in-law's amazing, by the way. She doesn't do this. See that's the thing with sermons, it's always like Joe needs to hear this. You need to hear this! You need to hear this.

This is a temptation for all of us. I've done this, all of us have done this. I ask the Lord to forgive me because in our love for others, we impress on them all the things that we think they need to be, when in fact people just need a friend. People need someone to love them. You can speak the truth to people, but don't manipulate people. Don't get angry with people when they don't conform to what you think.

Merely, hold your dreams for others loosely. Hold your dreams for your children, your spouse, your kids, hold it loosely. Don't let go of your desire. Hold it as a build that desire. But hold it loosely, hold it loosely and craft everything with wet clay.

Some of you, you'll be carrying those expectations into Christmas, let me tell you, there's no better way to ruin everyone's Christmas than by coming into Christmas with gigantic unchangeable expectations about how Christmas is supposed to be. It's just a perfect way to ruin Christmas for everybody. I'm being a little negative, aren't I? Let's just rewind this.

You're doing better than you think. I'm proud of you. I love you. Everyone else here loves you. Your children love you, your parents love you, so this year we're going to relax, and we're going to trust God. We're going to trust Him with our dreams, trust Him with our goals, trust Him with our families and our friendships and our jobs, and believe that He has the best in store.

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Friends, if you hear anything I say today it's this: don't let the enemy deceive you that the trouble you're going through means it's the end. It's the beginning. Your setback is a setup for a comeback. God is going to do something great in our life.

Father, we thank you. We love you, and most of all, we trust you. Your version of our dream is better than our version of our dream. We just believe that, and we thank you, it's in Jesus' name we pray, amen.

BENEDICTION – Bobby Schuller

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.