August 6, 2015 Don Riley

Officer Sean Bolton Message

The entire Bolton family saw the good of Memphis last night as over a thousand came to the visitation, as 926 police vehicles and motorcycles encircled the city in a sea of blue. Thank you Memphis for lining Walnut Grove. Thank you Memphis for standing on the passages. Thank you Memphis for assembling today and those who are watching this service broadcast. Thank you pastor Steve Gaines, Joe Jernigan, the incredible Bellevue hospitality, and thank you Phil Jernigan, Hannah Moore, and Terry Richards with Memorial Park who have coordinated this. The family particularly thanks Memphis Police director Toney Armstrong for personally meeting with them Sunday night, and then on Monday with a follow-up call. In addition, the family has commented to me how thankful they are the the compassion demonstrated by Mayor Wharton. Sean, as you can see on the slides, was born August 7th 1981 and died last Saturday, August 1st. Director Armstrong has already looked at my notes because God arranged the meeting on August 1st.

Sean is survived by his brother, Brian, his sister-in-law, Debra, his two sisters, Michelle and Jennifer, his mother Jean, Uncle Greg and Aunt Peggy. But Sean and his brother grew up together. They supported each other. They were best friends all their lives. Sean attended First Catholic School and then White Station where he played football and was an accomplished champion wrestler. I think of you in Law Enforcement saw him continue that on the streets of Memphis. He attended the University of Memphis where he studied political science. He spoke several languages. He was a voracious reader, as has been mentioned. He was a very bright intellect. So we honor the name of Sean Bolton. His name needs to be etched in the memory of every law enforcement supporter. We honor Sean for his service. All his life, Sean wanted to serve. He served, as you have heard, as a Marine. He served as a Memphis Policeman. I am serving today because I became a friend to the family during emotional highs and lows. I am a Presbyterian minister with Discipling Men, Inc. in and through Second Presbyterian Church and First Evan, and more recently preaching a six week series at Woodland Presbyterian Church. Now, I mention that because part of the ministry was officiating at the wedding of Brian and Debra. Sean was the best man. When Brian and Debra returned from their honeymoon, Brian called me and said that his father, also a Marine, had just died, and asked would I officiate at the memorial service. So June he had a wedding; July he had his father’s funeral. It was in preparation for that funeral that I was privileged to spend significant time with Sean.

One of characteristics I noticed about Sean was his love for practical jokes. He loved a good laugh. This tough Marine, this Memphis police officer, loved to show up at ceremonies in pink socks and pink ties. In fact the family asked me to honor Sean by wearing pink socks. So here they are. Only a real man can get away with that. Now after getting to know Sean as the best man in his brother’s wedding and after really spending time preparing for his father’s funeral, I told Sean I was proud of him.”Why?” he asked. The answer I gave is, “because you serve.” He said, “What do you mean?” I said, “Sean, you served as a Marine in Iraq. You serve as a policeman here in Memphis. You’re out there daily, weekly serving, putting your life on the line.” He just smiled that gentle giant smile. “But Sean, there’s a deep reason I thank you for serving. By serving you demonstrate the life of Jesus Christ.” He said, “How’s that?” I told him that Jesus in Mark 10:45 said to his disciples that he came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. I said, “Sean, everytime you serve, you demonstrate the life of Jesus. Sean, Jesus gave his life for you, and Jesus came not to be served but to serve.” You all here this day, every policeman, every Sheriff’s Deputy, every fireman, every EMT, paramedic, first responder, member of the military, every clergy, as has already been stated by Director Armstrong, you run toward while others run away. He was strong. He was tough. When dispatch sent Sean, the citizen got more than an appearance, more than a show-up. They got a guy that genuinely cared with compassion. Sean demonstrated the life of Jesus by serving. There are many civilians in the precinct where Sean served who have already publicly talked about how much they appreciate him, hanging balloons on their mailboxes. I told Sean I wanted to learn from him. I told him that the last couple year I served as a volunteer first responder with Shelby County Sheriff’s office. I thought about wearing the uniform today, but then there would have been the problem with those pink socks. This fun-loving Bolton group, especially Brian and Debra, they said it was alright. Maybe it was his way of handling the daily grind.

Those in law enforcement say to each other, “You can’t make this stuff up.” I mean you can’t invent stupidity. You face indifference, and ignorance, and stupidity, and witness the evil, despicable things that human beings do to each other, just as Jesus did. Jesus faced indifference, ignorance, and stupidity, and died for the evil, the despicable sinners such as myself, and most of you in this room. So we honor Sean’s name. We honor Sean’s service. His name needs to be etched in the memory of every supporter. You know we’ve mentioned other names already. Many leaders with recognizable names met with the Bolton family: Governor Haslam, Attorney General Wyrick, several state senators. The outpouring of top names has been amazing to Sean’s family. You know we have a great mayor of Memphis. We have a great mayor of Shelby County. We have a great Police Director of the Memphis Police Department. We have a great governor of the state of Tennessee. You know their names: AC Wharton, Mark Luttrell, Bill Odom, Toney Armstrong, Bill Haslam. That statement about their greatness is not a political statement. It is a spiritual statement. You see, they’re all great men because they all five men have and believe that there is a greater name, not just to mention, but to extol, not just to state, but to praise, not just quote, but to raise up. And that is the name that is above every name in heaven and of earth, the name Jesus Christ. These five men believe that there is no salvation in no one else. There is no other name unto heaven, given among men by which we must be saved. The bible says, “To all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.” And God gives the right to become his children. Paul says in Ephesians chapter two verses one through four, “You were dead in trespasses. You were the sons of disobedience. You lived by the desires of your body. You were depraved, and you were children of wrath.” Dead. disobedience, depraved, and doomed. Yes, non-Christians who do not name the name of Jesus are spiritually dead, spiritually disobedient, spiritually depraved, and spiritually doomed. And then the great Christian conjunction of verse four, “But God.” He made us alive in Christ. Are you alive with Christ? Let me in on a secret. I mentioned those five officials because all five are alive in Jesus Christ. They have an unapologetic, strong belief in the person and work of our Lord and Savior and that is the only reason I mention their name. You see all of the non-Christian religions of the world are defined by what you have to do in order to earn favor with God. But true, biblical Christianity is defined by what God has done. The difference between do and done is the difference between hell and heaven. It is Jesus plus nothing. This day if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved. Serving is a hallmark of being a Christian, but it does not make one a Christian. Law enforcement need encouragement, law enforcement need prayers, and law enforcement need Jesus.

The last twelve days, I’ve been out of town travelling. I met late last night with Brian and Debra after the Sea of Blue. We thanked the Perkins Restaurant at Park and White Station for staying open another hour so we could talk and then the rain came. You know travelling people often ask, “Where are you from?” I told them Memphis and they would often say, “Oh yeah Elvis!” or “Barbecue!” Some would bring up basketball. Over breakfast, lunch and dinner, I would say that Memphis is proud of Elvis. Memphis is proud of barbecue, the blues and basketball, but Memphis is also about Jesus. Most people want to talk about their cities. They want to characterize the city in one form or another. I want those around this nation and around this city to know that Jesus is alive and at work in Memphis. We are gathered to lift up the name of Jesus. We remember Sean Bolton. We honor the service of Sean Bolton, but we praise and worship the name of Jesus Christ. Now many here have questions. We know that God was not on vacation Saturday. Someone jumped out of the backseat of a car and killed Sean. That’s why I thought it was so eloquent the way Director Armstrong put it, “God called Sean home.”

You see we don’t live by explanations. We live by promises. God promises never to leave us or forsake us. Jesus said he is the Way, the Truth, and the Life and no comes to the Father but by him. We cannot explain God’s sovereignty with human responsibility. God determines each molecule, but he’s not the author of evil. He flings and flung the stars and he starts the very heartbeat of a baby. He reigns and rules and determines the course and life of each one of us. We are all tenants subject to eviction without notice.

During one battle, General Thomas Stonewall Jackson was asked by one of his officers why he put himself out front in the battle. Wasn’t he afraid of the bullet? “No,” Jackson said. “God predestines every bullet.” God took Sean home to be with Sean’s father who died only a month ago. These mysteries fall under the glory of God. The glory of God is the sum total of all he and who he is. Moses said, “Show me your glory.” God said, “No, you can’t handle it. It is my total outworking. I will hide you in the rock of ages. I will protect you from me, by me. I’ll put my hand, my power to protect you from the total glory of my Shekinah. Habakkuk said prophetically, “The knowledge of the glory of the Lord will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea.” Jesus said, “I have glorified you on earth having accomplished all that you have given me to do. Now return me to your glory, the glory I had with the Father before the foundation of the earth.” Paul prayed in Ephesians that the Father of glory would enable them to know him, to know his hope, to know his riches, to know his power. Then later he prayed that they would know his strength, depth, comprehension and fullness and that we would be a prayer answer instead of just getting a prayer answered.

Our city is a better place because of Sean Bolton. He lifted up the name of Jesus by bringing law and order. Sean Bolton demonstrated the life of Jesus by serving. He lived to the glory of God because he was a good, honest, hard-working Memphis police officer who loved to serve Memphis. He lifted up the name of Jesus by protecting this city. Thank you for the life well lived. As God would say to him, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

Gracious, heavenly Father, we lift up your name. Gracious, heavenly Father, we thank you for Sean Bolton. Gracious, heavenly Father, we ask that you would enable us to glorify your name. For it is in Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.