

LOVE BEYOND MEASURE

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Scripture: Romans 5:6-11

I'm going to start with a short story about Michael Mansoor, who got a lot of appreciation and reverence and admiration for the kind of person he was. Michael Mansoor was a young sailor who joined the United States Navy. During the course of this time, he was inducted into the SEAL Team. The SEALs are a group of elite tier-one operators who are given the task when nobody else can do it. During the career of Michael Mansoor, who was from Orange County, at a very early age in his life, he was given the third-highest honor in the United States Navy known as the Silver Star. This was given because in one of the deployments, he was fighting alongside his brothers in Iraq and during that time, one of his teammates got shot in the leg and was unable to escape the enemy fire. Despite all the bullets flying around, Mansoor carried him to safety and for that he was given the Silver Star award.

Later on in the year 2006 which ended fatally for him, he was given the ultimate honor in the United States Navy. This honor is known as the Medal of Honor, the highest ever given to anybody. He was just 25 years old. He was given that because while he was in the village of Ramadi, fighting alongside four of his team members and eight Iraqi soldiers, the villagers were kind of upset with the presence of the American soldiers and blocked off the entire access to the village so that there was no possibility of reinforcements to come in. Then they informed Al-Qaeda that this was the location of the American soldiers.

Mansoor was a machine gunner who took up a vantage point to keep an eye out where he could intercept the so-called enemy combatants. Suddenly out of the blue, a grenade was tossed on his location which bounced off his chest and fell down. All anyone remembers is Mansoor shouting "Grenade" as he moved from his position. The after-action report that was written by each and every member of the team said that Mansoor (or Mikey as they called him) was closest to the exit and he could have very well escaped. But instead, Mikey chose to jump head-on, on top of the grenade and with his chest, pressed it down. If you are familiar with ammunition, a grenade has got full capability of creating death only within 50 feet of itself, and of maiming somebody permanently for life if within 100 feet. Here was a man who fell flat on his chest on top of that grenade and took the full blast of it, saving all his team members in the bargain.

It is said that when the funeral was on at Fort Rosecrans National Cemetery, one might see all the white tombstones laid out – that's where they put all these people to rest. His coffin which was made of mahogany wood had turned gold. Why? Because it's a ceremonial act by every team member of the field team, that when an of their brothers have fallen in the line of duty, they remove their trident which is the Eagle Crest with the trident on it, and they punch it onto the coffin. It was just not his brothers but the entire United States Navy SEALs had come and punched their tridents over the coffin which turned it gold. Check it out on Google.

In 2012, a movie was released 'Act of Valor' which briefly gave a story about this. There was a kind of longevity to this. He was just 25 years old when he died, and I suppose he would have been just in his late teens when he joined. So his life in the Navy as a United States sailor was very short-lived. But his name carried on. Why? In 2014, the Special Warfare La Poste in San Diego was named after Mansoor and it was called Camp Mansoor. In 2017, the United States Navy launched the most sophisticated stealth warship, the USS Mansoor. All this because he showed an act of bravery, an act

of duty that went beyond his calling and his name remains etched in history, not in time back but forever more.

Why did I speak about Mansoor? What did he do? Mansoor was a young sailor who did what was his duty. It was just something that he was called for, he did it for his friends, and he did it for his teammates. But today we are going to look at somebody else who didn't do it for his friends, who didn't do it for his brothers. He did it for the enemies. It was the unparalleled love of God which caused Him to sacrifice Christ Jesus on the cross.

Romans 5:6-11 (NKJV)

⁶For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. ⁸But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. ¹⁰For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. ¹¹And not only *that*, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation."

Before I expand on these verses, I want you to focus on one particular word which starts off: Jesus died at the right time. NKJV says: "in due time Christ died". NASB says: "in the right time"; and the Message version says: "right on time", and various other variants. There is a very specific peculiarity to this word 'right on time'. You must have heard or read about the fullness of time. Galatians 4:4-5 reads, "But when the fullness of the time had come God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law to redeem those under the law, but that we might receive the adoption as sons." Here it speaks about fullness of time. there is a stark difference in what fullness of time and what right on time means. The Message version – ⁶⁻⁸ "Christ arrives right on time to make this happen. He didn't, and doesn't, wait for us to get ready."

So there has got to be some difference that we need to dwell upon. When the bible talks about fullness of time, it means something which was decided beforehand; it was pre-determined. It means that the coming of Christ was an event marked in time. it was a pivotal point in all of human history. To better understand this, everything that occurred before this event looked forward to this occurrence. Everything that happened after this event looks back at this occurrence and that is what it means to say – fullness of time. And that, in this sense of the bible, is the coming of Christ Jesus.

God sent His Son at the time which was appointed before all times and this was decided even before time began. Therefore, fullness of time has a completely different meaning behind it. But here the verse reads: at the right time or in due time. Just at the right time means it could not have been later or it could not have been different. There was no possibility of deferment. There was no possibility of it being delayed. There was something which decided this moment to be what we call in maritime terms, as crisis point. It was a point of crisis. What defines a crisis point? From God's point of view, it was a point where there was an immediate need of intervention; God said that this has to be intervened and that was the time for redemption for mankind. The situation that possibly God saw at that time was something that was not going to improve; it was not going to get better with time. it was only getting worse. Therefore, God thought at best that He needs to intervene. But more than that, it was God's decision to demonstrate His love.

This is where we're going to dwell deep into this demonstration of love – the ultimate price that was paid on the cross. Verse 8 says: "But God demonstrates His own love towards us that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Thinking about this, I wondered – Paul was a guy who knew what to write because he was led by the Spirit. So obviously there is no grammatical error here. He's used two words; one which says 'demonstrates' which means it's happening, it's now, it's on. Then he says 'Christ died' which happened, it was history, it was past. So, God's demonstration of love was not something He did then to show it to the world; it was an act which is on and on and on. It was there yesterday, it is there today and it will be there forever.

But the death of Christ, which he uses the word 'Christ died for us', it's done' once and for all. There will be no more repeat of that. It's not going to happen in version 2. No! It's over. That's why Christ said, "It is finished." Therefore it is something that we need to understand, that the act of Christ's death on the Cross is the ultimate demonstration of His love which is ongoing from then till infinity. It's not going to change. That's the ultimate act which is just demonstrating itself every day.

But something more was added in these verses: it says, "At the right time," and then it uses certain words to define that time. An event or occurrence that cost the time absolutely correct or required for the death of Christ. There is an emphasis by Paul on what we gained having been what we were in Christ's death or how much more we will benefit from having been brought alive in Christ. What was the state defined? "For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly, for scarcely for a righteous man will one die, yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love towards us, that while we were still sinners Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life."

What were the triggers for that crisis point that required God to intervene?

- Without strength (v. 6a)
- Ungodly (v. 6b)
- Sinners (v. 8)
- Enemies (v. 10)

v. 6: "For when we were still without strength, in due time, Christ died for the ungodly." Christ died for us when we were without strength. Checking Google is so much easier. I remember my childhood days going through Oxford dictionaries, Wren & Martin, and the thesaurus and everything to get the understanding clear, but Google makes life so much easier. So I'm going to make it easier for you by putting out the words that Google put for "without strength" – powerless, helpless, ineffectual, ineffective, useless, defenceless, vulnerable, weak, feeble, and paralyzed. The majority of these words kind of give an indication towards a state of physical being, powerless as physical capability. But the Bible is actually focusing more on the spiritual being. It's talking about the spiritually weak; it's talking about being powerless to resist sin, powerless to do right, and powerless to help ourselves. that is what the Bible means without strength. Christ died for us when we were without strength.

So, when we were powerless and without help and helpless, in whatever state we were, emotionally, spiritually or even if it were physical. If we were not able to resist any more, we were not able to hold ourselves against sin. Why? Don't you think it would have been easier for mankind to reach out to

the Creator King? But that didn't happen. Why not? If you understand sin, it has got a quicksand kind of influence on mankind. It is very difficult for you to come out unless somebody pulls you out. The more you struggle by yourself, it's going to draw you more in. That's how quicksand functions; there has to be external help.

John 6:37, 44

"³⁷Whoever comes to me I will never drive away." And that's God's promise. But suddenly it gets contrasted in v. 44 "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him." And that's the main point. No matter how much we reach out, unless that help reaches out to us, we are not coming out of it. and that's what happened here. There had to be a divine intervention. So unlike any other help, there was something more beautiful about this help that came.

Ephesians 2:5 "But because of His great love for us, God who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in our transgressions. It is by grace you have been saved." Even when we were dead in transgression, by grace you have been saved. What was the situation of mankind? Dead! Obviously sin had overtaken the world so much that we were dead in transgression. So we needed help. We were without strength; we were incapable of resisting ourselves against sin and it was becoming worse. Crises had developed; God had to intervene. Therefore God sent His Son to die on the cross for us. What's the beauty about this? God's love is so much more magnanimous that nothing was expected and yet everything was given. Nothing was help back in that help that reached out to us.

So when I said that when you were helpless, why doesn't one reach out? It's impossible because the help has to come from an external source, and God knew that that help had to be reached out to us. I used this illustration that we pray for the salvation of some friend, we would have seen that often we prayed 'n' number of times and nothing happened. And you would have also seen that you just prayed once and something happened. You would have also seen that the answer to that prayer happens on the deathbed. And that is something that makes us realize that it's not our reaching out; it's when God decides it is time and then when He calls him and draws that person, whatever you prayed for in the salvation of that person comes to pass. So no one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him.

V. 6b talks about "in due time Christ died for the ungodly." Christ died for us when we were ungodly. Again, let's look at some of the words that Google uses to describe ungodly. When you look at ungodly by itself, it's kind of diluted, mild. It's something that doesn't give that punch. But there is more to the word ungodly – unholy, godless, blasphemous, sacrilegious, profane, heathen, pagan, atheistic, irreverent, immoral, corrupt, depraved, sinful, wicked, evil, devilish, fiendish, demonic, diabolical. Some of the real touch words are wicked, demonic, and diabolical. So being ungodly has got a very strong dark side to it. and that's what was defined here when it says in due time Christ died for us when we were ungodly. Let's try to understand a little bit more.

Romans 1:21 "For although they knew God, they never glorified Him as God, nor gave thanks to Him, but their thinking became futile, and their foolish hearts were darkened." Although they knew God, they never glorified Him as God nor gave thanks to Him. How is that possible? Identifying somebody as God Almighty yet not giving Him his due is not just an act of disregard or not acknowledging; it's pure rebellion. It's what the word ungodly means – demonic, diabolical, against what God has intended. It's not so much of wickedness or evil but rather wrong attitude. It's something which is

intentionally coming from your heart. I had used the example in the first service and my kids came running after me saying, "We don't do that!" So I'm going to tell it again. If your children refuse to identify you as the father of the house, what is your plight? If your children refuse to give the required respect to the father of the house, how would the father feel? Now think about how God, the Creator of man, feels when He sees that these people know that He is God but they refuse to identify Him as God, they refuse to give Him the required glory and praise. And yet, the One and only One who worshipped God wholeheartedly in spirit and in truth died for these ungodly people.

In vs. 7 and 8 it says, "Christ died for us when we were sinners for scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man, someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

Why did Paul use the two words righteous and good? If one were to read it in passing, you kind of assume it's the same thing. But it's not. There is a stark difference here as well.

A righteous man is somebody who is doing it out of what is within; he's doing it as being right in his heart, he is doing it out of his innocence, he's doing it in truth. Stretching that, a righteous man is one who doesn't deserve to die. And a good man is somebody who is doing it out of action. He's doing it because he's socially behaving himself in a manner that is acceptable. He is doing it out of an emotional expression of compassion, of kindness, of warmth, as an interaction with fellow beings. So it is very important for us to understand why Paul used the words righteous and good. Because righteous is happening inside, good is happening on the outside. I'm sure each one of us would have had an experience of encountering somebody in our lives who has been overwhelmingly, overbearingly good to us, who has done so much good to us that we find ourselves somehow overburdened with that goodness and we are ready to do anything for that person. You found yourself as a recipient of so much of good from this person that you're ready possibly to give up your life for him. But if it was something to do with the person who is righteous, I don't know what's happening in his heart. I don't know what's happening with him. I'm sure I'm not going to give up my life for him.

But what happens when this same person is neither righteous nor good? You don't see any goodness in him, you don't see any compassion in that person. You don't see any love in the way that he deals with you. You only see anger, you see only discontent, you only see confrontation. Would anyone even want to die for such a person, or do anything for such a person, leave alone die? And yet, Christ Jesus decided to die for them. Because it says, God demonstrates His love for us in this, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. It would take a lot of love to die for even righteous or even possibly a good man; but it will take an infinitely, possibly impossible amount of love to go to that extent for somebody who is against you. In other words, Christ died for us. We were neither righteous nor good; we were absolute sinners, undeserving of what we got.

Vs. 9-11 says "Christ died for us when we were God's enemies. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life"

To understand this more clearly, this means that sin was not only a failure, but it can easily be understood that we were falling short of God's will or short of God's glory. But understand this: it was not that we wanted to do God's will and we were doing God's will and falling short of that mark. It was outright that we didn't want to do God's will. So there was no mark being tried to achieve; we

just fell short of God's glory because we decided to do God's will. Like I read earlier, man identified Him as God but refused to acknowledge that. So there was a kind of rebellious attitude of the heart; there was hostility in the heart. It was a hostility towards not only towards God but also being under God's judgment. It was hostility identifying that there is a judgment from God for being wrong. We refused to identify that. And here's the thing – there was hostility from God's side also, not towards man but to its sin which is there in the bible very clearly. God completely uproots sin; for Him, the wages of sin is death. So God realized that there had to be an immediate intervention, and therefore the ultimate price was paid – the ultimate sacrifice.

Paul reads it forward in v. 11, "For when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to Him through the death of His Son. How much more having being reconciled shall we be saved through His life. this is something we need to literally absorb into our lives. What happened that many years back was when we were against God? We were given something which we did not deserve and yet, there was so much reconciliation in that situation where you are against God.

So what more do we benefit when we stand as co-heirs with Jesus Christ today? The word 'co-heirs' kind of gets diluted in its understanding, but it is the entire rights and privileges that Jesus enjoys which we do as being His brothers and sisters, as being children of God. That was the elevation given to us from what we were. Sinners, enemies today stand justified rightfully claiming what God has in store for us. Paul was trying to get this message across when he started from v. 6, and trying to tell the church that this is what was your situation, yet today you stand justified, reconciled.

So think about what's going to happen beyond!

Let me drive home the point with another short story. You must have heard about the story of "The Drawbridge Keeper". This has been in circulation since December 1997, but it was written over three decades earlier. It was known as "To Sacrifice a Son". It was a short story written by Dennis Hensley. There are claims to its truthfulness, as to whether it actually happened, but I won't go into that. It's a story worth listening to and understanding.

There was this bridge that spanned across a very large river. This river was used by ships and whenever ships would pass, the bridge would stand parallel with the banks to allow the ships to pass. The closest bridge of this kind is in Kolkata in Kidarpur, but it is used basically for vehicular traffic. It stands now connected on the roadside because the dock movements have been stopped. But the bridge also used to turn 90 degrees and so usually stayed parallel along the banks and the bridge keeper always kept an eye out for the trains that would come down the hill so that he could turn the bridge around. Usually goods train or cargo trains would come infrequently. But this was the time for one of the passenger trains to come. It was one of the very few trains that would come and so the bridge operator knew that it was very important for him to be on time and on task.

As he was keeping his watch, he observed the twinkling light of that steam engine rolling down the hill. He waited for the apt moment that he would need to go to close the bridge. I told you it was used for shipping, so he could not close the bridge much earlier. He had to do it at the right time to avoid disruption to the shipping traffic as well as allow the train to pass. So when he knew that the time was right, he went and operated the bridge. The bridge turned; it came into the position across the river but the locking mechanism did not work. The keeper immediately knew that if he didn't lock the bridge when the train came over it, the speed and the vibration of the train would cause the bridge to sway and the train would not be able to pass safely.

The only option was for him to run to the opposite side and put the manual mechanism into place and lock it. So without much time to lose, he ran frantically across the bridge, reached the other side, and just as the train was closing in he locked the lever in place. Once the lever was locked, he had to use his entire body strength to hold it in place. It was mechanical; not the original switch. He had his entire body weight resting on that lever when suddenly his blood ran cold. His strength seemed to leave him as he heard a voice, "Daddy, where are you?" He looked across and saw his four-year-old son walking across the bridge looking for his father who wasn't where he was supposed to be.

The bridge keeper immediately knew that he would not have time to run across to get his son and bring him back to safety, and then lock the lever again. So he started shouting, "Run, run!" But sadly, you can understand how much a four-year-old would be able to do. He had to make a decision – the life of one or the lives of many. The decision was immediately made and the train went past at full speed. Everybody on that train was unaware of the lifeless body and broken bones being mercilessly thrown into the river, unaware of the old man slumped over the lever, holding it locked in place, unaware what he would say to his wife about what had happened to his son.

If you can comprehend the emotions that would have gone through the mind of this father, you can comprehend what would have been the feelings of our Father in heaven when He knowingly sent Jesus Christ down for us. Remember Michael Mansoor, when I told you he fell chest down on that grenade to take the full blast of the impact of that explosion? Christ Jesus took the full blast of that sin for our sake when He died on the Cross. The only difference was Mansoor died for his friends, and Jesus died for His enemies, for the ungodly.

I was trying to understand how this can be quantified and I asked my youngest daughter how much she loved me. Her response would always be depending on the highest number she learned that week. The last I checked, it was 10,000. But I was wondering, if I were to look at Jesus, there was love beyond measure. It was something that could not be put into numbers.

When you sing that song, "Christ in me"

What gift of grace is Jesus my Redeemer,

There is no more for heaven now to give.

Heaven gave the best that it could give!

Amen.