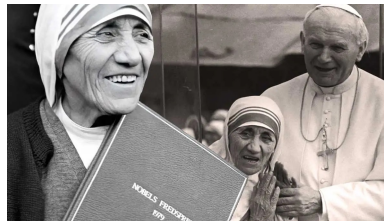


Worth-y

Romans 5: 1-10

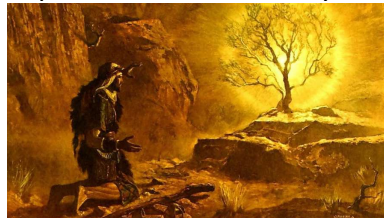
John 3: 14-21



In 1979 a Roman Catholic nun, Mother Teresa, was given the Nobel Peace Prize. Most of her adult life was spent ministering to the poor and diseased in Calcutta, India. She accepted the prize with the comment, "I am unworthy."



We have officially left the Christmas season, but as we look back on the gift we were given in Jesus Christ, a humble person should respond the same, "I am unworthy." Our humble God came to humble people like the shepherds who know they are outcasts because of their sins.



Moses, Israel's most revered leader, responded to God in the burning bush by asking, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?"

The great prophet, Isaiah, confessed, "I am a man of unclean lips."

The great Christian, Paul, author of much of our New Testament, confessed that he was "chief of sinners."



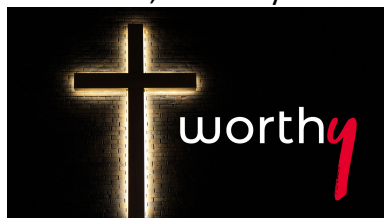
When Charlemagne, the ruler the Holy Roman Empire, died, his funeral procession came to the cathedral door. There they were shocked to find the gate barred by the bishop.

"Who comes?" shouted the bishop. The heralds answered, "Charlemagne, Lord and King of the Holy Roman Empire!" Answering for God, the bishop replied, "Him I know not! Who comes?"

The heralds, a bit shaken, answered, "Charles the Great, a good and honest man of the earth!" Again the bishop answered, "Him I know not. Who comes?"

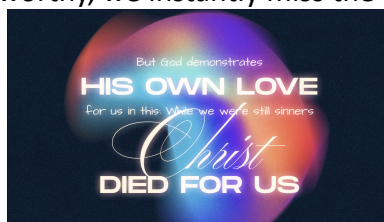
Not quite sure what else to say, the heralds responded, "Charles, a lowly sinner, who begs the gift of Christ." "Him I know," the bishop replied. "Enter! Receive Christ's gift of life!"

It's not often we come across people who seem to have it all together, but also possess the self-awareness to know that they remain sinners, that they are still unworthy.



When we come to church and call ourselves Christians, I think it gets ever and ever easier to think more highly of ourselves than we should. We hear of all God has done for us and how much He loves us and maybe we start to think we're good. Maybe we start to think that we're worthy of all this good stuff, that we've earned it.

But there's a trap there. When we start to think we are worthy, and that God has chosen to offer us salvation because we're worthy, we instantly miss the point.



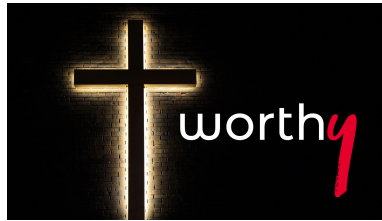
Paul's letter to the Romans puts this rather plainly:

⁶ You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. ⁸ But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Christ didn't die for us when we were worthy. We didn't do anything right for that sacrifice to be made on our behalf. In fact, Paul tells us that we were powerless, we were ungodly.

He then takes it a step further and says that sometimes a person will be willing to die for a good person. We talk about that sometimes in hypothetical situations. Would we ever consider dying for someone, and if so, who would that be? A spouse? A child? A friend?

We have members of the Secret Service who surround and guard our president, who would be willing to step in front of a bullet to save that one person.



And in all of these scenarios, we're talking about one thing: who to us is worthy of that ultimate sacrifice?

But Paul says that God did something very different than all that. God decided to step in while we were still sinners. While we were sinners, while we were unworthy of that sacrifice, Jesus Christ died for us.

We didn't do anything right to make God do that. We weren't worthy of the sacrifice. If we want to be very honest with ourselves, we aren't worthy of that sacrifice to this very day.

We remain sinners. We say one thing and do another. We know we should love our neighbor, but we don't. We know we should love the Lord our God with all our hearts, but we turn away from Him.

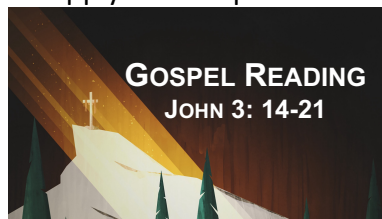
We are still sinners. We are not worthy of this type of love.



So I think that leaves us with a question. I think it leaves us asking, "Why?"

Why does he continue to love us when we continue to sin? Why would He die for us if we weren't worthy to receive that sacrifice? Why would he do that knowing we would never do anything worthy of that level of love?

Let's take that "Why?" question and apply it to scripture.



From the third chapter of John, verses 14-21:

¹⁴ Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, ¹⁵ that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him."

¹⁶ For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. ¹⁹ This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰ Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. ²¹ But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.



Yes, we just read the most famous and most often-quoted scripture in our Bible. But I think it's so well-known for a reason. There's a life-changing, world-changing truth contained in those words.

God sent His son, knowing everything that would entail, to save the world. He sent His only Son for one reason: He loved the world. He loved us.

And I think that in itself is our answer to that "Why?" question.

God did that because He loves us that much.



God didn't save the world through Jesus Christ because he judged us and found us worthy, He did that because He looked at us and saw worth.

Knowing all that God knows about us, and He knows quite a bit because He created us, He looked at us and saw something of value. He saw something that has worth.

Two ladies were taking a walk through a park one afternoon. As they walked by a pond, they happened across a frog that was making some rather unusual noises. So one of the ladies bent down to listen closer to what the frog was saying.

To her shock, she heard words coming out of the frog's mouth! "I'm really a wealthy businessman," the frog was saying, "and if you just give me a single kiss, I will be forever grateful to you and you will want for nothing ever again."

The woman scooped up that frog and, rather than kissing it, stuffed it in her purse.

"Well? Aren't you going to kiss it?" her friend asked.

"No way!" the woman replied. "A talking frog is worth WAY more than any businessman."

Now, okay. Maybe that's not the greatest example of how God looks at us. But maybe we can salvage something of value out of that story.

We don't need to be someone of great earthly value to have worth to God. We haven't done anything to make ourselves worthy. There is nothing we can do to make us worthy. We don't even need to first change, to get ourselves together, in order to have value to God.

God sees worth in us as we are today, as we are right now. Warts and bumps and all, we have worth to God. We have enough worth that He took some major steps to make sure we always had a pathway to return to Him.



What we are really talking about today boils down to one word we throw around a lot, and that's grace.

This is what the essence of God's grace truly means. We didn't earn it. We weren't worthy of receiving it. But God found worth in us, still.

He takes us as we are, He loves us as we are. While we were still sinners, while we were ungodly and powerless, He sees something that is worth saving. He sees something that is worth making into a new thing.

He saw something that was worth dying to save.

When I think about God's grace, that is the thought that makes it click for me. I was never worthy of receiving it. I can work my whole life and never become worthy of receiving it.



But God sees worth in offering me salvation.

That's the good news of Jesus Christ we can share with the world.

We're not worthy, but in God's eyes, we are of sacred worth.

And all of God's people said...