

“AREN’T THEY WORTH IT?”  
Jeremiah 4:11-12, 22-28, I Timothy 1:12-17, Luke 15:1-10  
September 14 & 15, 2019

A statement from Tony Evans caught my attention this week. Tony says, “I have a basic philosophy about roaches. The only good roach is a dead roach. That’s right. That’s my philosophy. If I come out late at night, turn on the light, and see a roach, that roach is in bigtime trouble. Why? Because I’m going to kill it dead. I’m going to kill it with passion. I won’t just kill that one roach either. I’m going to kill its mother. I’m going to kill its father. I’m going to kill its children. I hope to find the roach at its family reunion so that I can wipe out the whole clan. I have no mercy on roaches. While one roach may be cleaner than another roach, they are all still roaches and they deserve to die.”<sup>1</sup>

Looking out at you all today, I see that you also have this same philosophy about roaches. The only good roach is a dead roach. But the reason that I even mention this philosophy, is that this same mindset we have about roaches is what God has toward sin. Death is the **JUDGMENT** God has for sin, and we see that in the Old Testament lesson for today of Jeremiah 4:1-12 and 22-28. God’s judgment toward sin is just like our judgment toward roaches – WIPE IT OUT!

No matter what it is, no matter how serious it might be, no matter how many it affects, God **HATES** sin!!! And He desires to wipe out sin with the passion we have of wiping out roaches. Not just the sin we have right now in our life, but the sins we struggled with yesterday and the day before, and the ones we’ll be facing tonight and tomorrow and the day after. God is on a mission to wipe out sin!

And we see that in Jeremiah 4:22 when “*The Lord says, ‘My people are stupid; they don’t know me. They are like foolish children; they have no understanding. They are experts at doing what is evil, but failures at doing what is good.’*” We’re all in that category, but God doesn’t like us to be there. He would rather us being more like Him in all our ways.

The people of Israel during Jeremiah’s time had almost all turned away from God. They had sought out all sorts of false foreign gods, and had put them over Jehovah-Elohim, the Lord God. And

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<sup>1</sup> (Tony Evans, *Tony Evans’ Book of Illustrations*, [Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2009] pg. 287, #861)

despite their warnings of what would happen to them if they did not return their devotion to the Lord God, they refused to abandon their sinful and evil ways. So God informed them what was to come.

You see, the **END-RESULT** of sin is death and destruction. God gave Jeremiah a vision of what the earth would look like when He got done punishing the people of their sins if they did not repent. Jeremiah says, *“I looked at the earth – it was a barren waste; at the sky – there was no light. I looked at the mountains – they were shaking, and the hills were rocking back and forth. I saw that there were no people; even the birds had flown away. The fertile land had become a desert; its cities were in ruins because of the Lord’s fierce anger...The earth will mourn; the sky will grow dark. The Lord has spoken and will not change His mind. He has made His decision and will not turn back”* (4:23-26, 28). Do you hear the hatred God has toward sin? He is passionate about destroying every little bit, and those who practice sin and refuse to repent are going to suffer the wrath of God’s anger toward sin.

But we seem to completely disregard this philosophy that God has toward sin. We brush it off and think that God will relent from His fierce anger even if we don’t repent. We seem to think that we can still do what we please, even against God’s laws and commands, and still stand in God’s good graces! WRONG! Surely our sins will find us out, and we will suffer the consequences of them. But we, just like the people of Israel in Jeremiah’s day, seem to be convinced that it will never happen.

Jeremiah 5:7-11 reflects how God feels about this, though. *“The Lord asked, ‘Why should I forgive the sins of My people? They have abandoned Me and have worshiped gods that are not real. I fed My people until they were full, but they committed adultery and spent their time with prostitutes. They were like well-fed stallions wild with desire, each lusting for his neighbor’s wife. Shouldn’t I punish them for these things and take revenge on a nation such as this? I will send enemies to cut down My people’s vineyards, but not to destroy them completely. I will tell them to strip away the branches, because those branches are not Mine. The people of Israel and Judah have betrayed Me completely. I, the Lord, have spoken.”* Is it any different for us here in the United States, here in Wisconsin, even here in Sheboygan? Unless we repent and turn from our wicked ways, this will be our fate as well!

But there is **HOPE**. God will not completely destroy the whole earth. *“The Lord has said that the whole earth will become a waste-land, but that He will not completely destroy it”* (Jer. 4:27). The call is for us to repent and turn from our own wicked ways and return to the Lord so that He can send us His mercy and grace.

You see, the hope we have is in **JESUS CHRIST**. In I Timothy 1:12-14, the Apostle Paul tells his disciple, Timothy, *“I give thanks to Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength for my work. I thank Him for considering me worthy and appointing me to serve Him, even though in the past I spoke evil of Him and persecuted and insulted Him. But God was merciful to me because I did not yet have faith and so did not know what I was doing. And our Lord poured out His abundant grace on me and gave me the faith and love which are ours in union with Christ Jesus.”*

Abundant **GRACE** is poured out on us because of God’s great love for us. He saw our desperate need for forgiveness, and made it possible for our sinfulness to be atoned for through the life, death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus. It is only as we repent of our sin, recognize the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross as our payment for the sin in our lives, and claim Jesus to be our Savior and Lord, that we find hope for life. Sin brings death to all of us, but in letting Jesus be our Savior, we receive the forgiveness we do not deserve, because His blood shed for us assuaged God’s anger and wrath towards us.

Therefore, the grace of the Lord is for **SINNERS** like me – and you, too. Listen how Paul puts it in 4:15, *“This is a true saying, to be completely accepted and believed: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. I am the worst of them...”* (I Tim. 1:15). Some of us could argue with Paul about being the worst of sinners, but the point is that Jesus’ sole purpose here on the earth was to bring us back into a relationship with the Lord God. Just like Jeremiah pled with the people of Israel in his day, Paul invites us, even pleads with us, to return to the Lord God here in our own day. For God still hates sin, and will punish all those who refuse to come back to Him. *“Yet to all who receive(d) Him, to those who believe(d) in His name, He (gives) the right to become children of God...”* (John 1:12), and we find His abundant grace showered onto us.

But here's an important thing to remember and to implement into our own lives, God's **MERCY** is shown to me as an example to others of what the Lord can do for them as THEY, TOO, come to Christ Jesus. Listen to how Paul puts it; "...*God was merciful to me in order that Christ Jesus might show His full patience in dealing with me, the worst of sinners, AS AN EXAMPLE for all those who would later believe in Him and receive eternal life*" (I Tim. 1:16).

God's mercy is available to ALL of us, but how is the world to hear about this great mercy of God through Jesus Christ unless WE become the witnesses of that mercy? God has shown His mercy on each one of us who believe in Jesus Christ, SO THAT WE might live in such a way as to be an example of what God can do for anyone else who finds themselves "the worst of all sinners."

Now, if we were to take a few minutes, we could come up with quiet a list of those throughout history could be included into that list of "worst of sinners." What about Adolph Hitler, Genghis Kahn, Joseph Stalin, Napoleon Bonaparte, Idi Amin, Al Capone, Ed Gein, Jeffrey Dahmer, or Warren Waddell? All great sinners who stand in need of God's mercy and grace in order to find forgiveness and reconciliation through the love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord! But I'm getting ahead of myself.

Let's take a moment and look at the **EXAMPLE** of Jesus in the Gospel text of Luke 15:1-10. Here we find the Pharisees and teachers of the law pointing fingers at Jesus. They observed how the tax collectors and other outcasts (sinners) were gathering to Jesus to listen to Him. In their great disgust, they start muttering among themselves, "*This man welcomes outcasts and even eats with them!*" (Lu. 15:2). You see, in their minds, any respectable Rabbi would **not** stoop so low as to let the rabble and "trash" of their society have contact with them. As a Rabbi, they were to be the example of righteousness for the people so that they might work their way toward righteousness, themselves. However the self-righteous Pharisees and teachers of the Law forgot that as the examples of God's righteousness, they were to help guide the people back to God. Instead, these religious leaders separated themselves from the rest of the people in order to remain "pure" in their own minds. So as they muttered and grumbled and complained against Jesus reaching out to the lost souls of that day, Jesus

gave them some lessons to think about. They are for us, too, mind you, but they were first for them.

Jesus talked about the LOST SHEEP, how a flock owner who recognizes that one of his one hundred sheep has gotten lost from the rest of the flock, leaves the flock in the open and diligently searches out for the one that was lost. Maybe it's at the precipice of a great cliff, maybe cornered by a wild predator, or maybe just happily eating its way away from the rest, this one did not know the danger it was in. But the owner of the sheep found the lost one, carried it back to the rest of the flock, and then cried out, "Rejoice with me, for I have found my lost sheep!" He wasn't content with having the 99 left in the field. That one sheep meant a lot to him and he was willing to go after it in order to save it.

And Jesus talked about the LOST COIN, how a woman with ten silver coins discovers one is lost somewhere in her house. It should have been with the rest, but somehow it had gotten lost. She was not content with just having the other 9 coins. No, she desperately searches for the lost coin, turning the whole house up-side-down in order to recover it. And when she does, she calls all her friends and neighbors together and says, "Rejoice with me, for I have found my lost silver coin!"

In both cases, the lost item was valuable enough to the owner that they expended considerable time and energy searching for what was lost until they found it. But let me ask, "What is most VALUABLE to you?" What is it that you would give your whole attention to finding once you discovered that it was lost?

Maybe it's your POSSESSIONS? Your car at the mega-mall parking lot? Your diamond earrings handed down from your grandmother? Your sail boat after terrific hurricane? Or maybe it's your remote control airplane that has lost radio contact and is now flying in free-flight? Those things are precious to you so you spend much time searching for them again once they become lost.

Maybe it's your MONEY? You've lost your wallet and that's where your expendable cash is. Or your bank account report comes to you with a huge discrepancy. Or maybe it's your 401K that suddenly takes a hit from a Stock Market drop. You want that money back and you'll search long and hard to find it.

Or maybe it's **PEOPLE** you love? The child that is abducted or suddenly goes missing. The brother or sister you never knew that you had, but came upon somehow. The loved one on an airliner that suddenly disappears. The child that leaves home angrily vowing never to come back. Loved ones who are washed away in a mud slide, or blown away by a tornado or hurricane. Who wouldn't look for these? They are precious to us and they are valuable to us.

These are the things that we put value upon in our lives, those things and that money and those people. Yet there are other things important to us. How about a scientist diligently looking for the cure of a disease? Or for that rare diplomat diligently seeking peace between two warring nations? Or what about that young person desperately looking for the kind of job she's been trained for? What about the volcanologist eagerly watching the seismographs to predict when the eruption might take place? If we would look long and hard for any one of these things, it would mean that they have great value to us and that our quest to find these things is a high priority in our life.

But what about the **LOST PEOPLE** around you? What about those who are on the precipice of the cliff of death? What about those who are so lost they don't even know they are lost? What about those who are so adamant that their belief and thinking and lifestyle is right when everything else around them screams the opposite? What about those who are so consumed with the stuff of this world that they "don't have time" to think about submitting themselves to anyone or anything else? What about those who are addicted to drugs or alcohol? What about those struggling with difficulties in their lives? What about the poor, the outcasts, the "worst of sinners?" How about the mass murderers, the violent, or the dangerous? How about those who would rather wipe us off the earth as to look at us? Do we value them as important in our own lives? Sadly, the answer is Not Very Much.

How does God see them? Does God value them as much as He values us? And if God values them and desires them to turn away from their wicked ways and come back to Him, how will they **HEAR** about Jesus? Who's going to value them enough to spend time and energy searching for them and seeking to help them find their way back to God? Most of these probably have never heard about

Jesus, and if they have, they don't have any relationship with Him because of something taking place in their life to turn them away from Him. How will they hear about Jesus if we don't start doing it?

Let me ask you this important question, "Are any people **BEYOND** the love of Jesus?" Is anyone so sinful that they are no longer able to find forgiveness? Are there any people who are "trash" to Jesus? The answer is emphatically, "**NO!!!**" We are all important to Jesus. Luke 19:10 tells us, "*For the Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost.*" Who are the lost? All of us!

We have all been in a condition of being enemies of God. "*We have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God*" (Romans 3:23). None of us is perfect, without sin in our life. BUT some of us have come to know the pathway to life and have accepted Jesus Christ as our Savior. But what about the rest? Aren't **THEY** worth it to hear about forgiveness, and grace, and love? If Jesus came to this world to seek sinners (that's all of us), and since Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life through whom we can come back to the Father, aren't all peoples valuable enough to Him that He would diligently seek them, too?

And if God desires **ALL PEOPLE** to turn back to Him, doesn't that prove that every person is valuable enough to Him that they hear the Good News of Salvation through Jesus Christ so that they can be saved? YES!!! But the big question is "Who will go for the Lord to reach out to these lost people?"

You see, many times we begin to see each other as the roaches in our life and we desperately want to destroy THEM so that THEY are out of our life. But God does not see the people of the world as the roaches who deserve to die! God sees SIN as that which deserves to die. God loves all people, and desires that every one of them to come to the point of making Him first in their life so that they might become free from the wages of sin, which is death, and find eternal life through Jesus.

So that list of "worst of sinners" that we began earlier, put my name on the very top of that list. Then put your name under my name, then proceed to make that list of the "horribles" in world history. God cares about even the worst of sinners and desires that we seek Him.

However, many of us get so caught up with our own lives that we forget that our role as a

Christian is to be a witness to the world of the love and grace and mercy and forgiveness found in Jesus Christ our Lord. Folks, it's not about us enjoying life to the fullest. It's not about us reveling in the abundance of God's blessings. Our life as a Christian is to follow Jesus' priority, "*to seek and to save that which is lost.*" We are to be the witness of the love of God to EVERYONE in this world so that they might come to know Jesus Christ. Use the blessings of God to bring others back to Him!

Hear the words of Paul again, "*...But God was merciful to me because I did not yet have faith and so did not know what I was doing*" (I Tim. 1:13). He was "*merciful to me in order that Christ Jesus might show His full patience in dealing with me...as an example for all those who would later believe in him and receive eternal life*" (I Tim. 1:16). That's OUR CALL, TOO, folks! God has led us to find faith in Jesus Christ so that our life might be cleaned up and eradicated from sin SO THAT WE might help others to find that same forgiveness. It's not for us to keep it to ourselves, but to show to those around us, even those who would desire to destroy us, so that they might have the chance to turn away from their own wicked ways and come back to God to enjoy His blessings and find His abundant grace.

So WHERE could you go? WHAT could you do to be an ambassador for Jesus? Who are those "worst of sinners" in your own life that need to hear the Gospel of Jesus? Who are those "detestables" in your life that seem to be doing everything they can to self-destruct? AREN'T THEY WORTH HAVING THE CHANCE TO FIND NEW LIFE, TOO? Aren't they just as valuable to God as we are? YES!

You don't have to look very far to find someone to begin working with. Look at your own family first. Then look to those you connect with on a daily basis. Then look into the paper and find those who have been arrested or have warrants out for their arrest. Begin praying for them, giving them up to the Lord, asking Him to give you a chance to talk with them and share your story of faith with them so that they might find Jesus. There are plenty of folks who need you to live for Jesus so that they might see Him in you and begin their own way back to the Lord. Let's pray...

Father, use even us to be Your witnesses everywhere we go, in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.