

46-15-06.wpd --A Holiday Takes Death

Easter, resurrection, death, victory

1 Cor 15:54-57

Easter is the holiday that takes the sting out of death.

### **INTRODUCTION:** (text as the Scripture reading)

--**Title.** [*Death Takes a Holiday*, was a 1934 movie with Frederick March about death personified, coming down in a human form to see what life among humans is like and falling in love with a beautiful woman.] Easter is "*a holiday that takes death.*" It's the story of Life coming down in the form of a human with the purpose of searching for a beautiful bride and liberating her from the captivity of death. That Bride is us, the Church, the Bride of Christ. Easter is a celebration of that liberation. **HOM.idea.** (re-read text).

### **I. Easter is the Central Holiday of Christianity**

- A. Easter Sunday is the defining and ultimate Christian holiday (all other Sundays come from it)
- B. Christ arose the 1<sup>st</sup> day of the week, which became the Christian day of weekly celebration (like a birthday party every week).
  1. It was an incredible change to switch, after thousands of years, from the *Sabbath* (Saturday) to *Sunday* as the day to honor God, but the change showed the intensity of what was taking place.
  2. Instead of celebrating the end of a time of work, as with the Sabbath day of rest, Sunday celebrates the beginning of a new work, a beginning of a new life, resurrection life, every week.
- C. But why are holidays like Easter important? [lit., "holy days," days *set apart*]? **It's for remembrance!** (because we forget important things) [When Greece defeated Persia at the Battle of Marathon, a herald named Pheidippides ran 25 miles to Athens with a one-word message that he delivered just before he died, "Victory!" This 25 mile run became the basis of today's marathon races, and *The Saturday Review* once ran a cartoon about Pheidippides showing him reaching Athens but saying, "I forgot the message."]

**TRANS:** The Church sometimes forgets her message of victory. We too are each running a long marathon, and at the end of it, we die, but the reason for our journey is the message of hope that we hold in our hearts and that we hold out to others: "Victory!" We must not forget it! So we meet each week on the day of the week that marks our victory. We meet

again and again at the Communion Table... to remember. And every year at Easter we celebrate a holiday that reminds us that in Christ our Lord, who took the sting out of death, we have the victory. YET...

### **II. Easter is Celebrated in the Midst of a Pessimistic World**

- A. We live in a world of worries (*about the national economy, about politics in general, about the health-care system, about crime-rate, about terrorism* [one year we had a bomb threat on Easter morning right across the street from Eskaton Village]).
- B. The cause of human pessimism is a tension behind what we see in **v.54** ("*the perishable*" vs. "*the imperishable*" ... "*the mortal*" vs. "*immortality*")
  1. God has placed a longing in our hearts for the imperishable [We buy products with a concern, "How long will it last? We don't want it to break down on us. Give me a guarantee!"] But by human experience, we know that eventually *everything wears out*, everything! And that knowledge can lead to pessimism, despair, and a dim view of life.
  2. BUT there's a longing built into us-- Eccl 3:11, He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end. (We can't explain the longing, but we have it, and yet looking around we see all *our dreams*, all *our yearnings*, all *our ambitions* finally swallowed up by decay and death.

**TRANS:** When people look around and see all this decay and death, they sometimes come up with statements of pessimism, like the one that you used to see on bumper stickers that clearly stated this pessimism: "*Life's a bitch, then we die.*" That's crass language, and not pleasant to listen to, but the message is even more unpleasant, if it was true. But it's not true! We listen to different words and a different message: "*Christ is risen!*" and "*He is risen indeed!*" Easter cancels out the pessimism or our world. Easter swallows up death in a victory that takes pessimism out of the believer's life, because it takes the sting out of death.

### **III. Easter Celebrates the Defeat of Death**

- A. John 3:16, 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**-- Eternal Life is not a thing but a Person, the Person who came Heaven to free us from the sting of death and give us victory over the grave.

B. At Calvary, death was swallowed up in victory by Eternal Life.

1. Remember how Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane made the difficult choice to drink the cup of suffering and death, praying to His Father, "Not my will, but Yours be done."
2. As the time of someone's death approaches, people say, "*It's near the end now*" or "*It will soon be over.*" But Christ's choice to swallow down that cup allows us today to actually speak up in a mocking way to the threat of death-- v.55, "*Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?*" [Easter victory allows us to face death in the way a caterpillar faces the cocoon, which it spins is like a grave where it rests in peace and ceases to exist as caterpillar. It's not the end, but the beginning, because soon it will be transformed into a beautiful butterfly.]
3. Christ defeated the power behind death-- v.55, *The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.*
  - a. The law of God tells us the boundary line separating life and death (sin puts us on the wrong side of that boundary line where we fall under the power of death).
  - b. So then, sin, which is our action of crossing that boundary line, becomes an employer that pays its employees with the currency of death-- Rom 6:23a, For the wages of sin is death...
  - c. Jesus redirected the payment of sin's wages to Himself, thereby swallowing them up, so that we're left holding another currency, *eternal life*, as the second half of that verse says-- Rom 6:23b, **BUT** the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

C. Our celebration of Easter is one of thanksgiving-- v.57, *But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

1. The sin of breaking God's laws leads to pessimism, but Christ's provision of salvation from sin leads to thanksgiving.
2. Holy Communion is also called the Eucharist ["thanksgiving"] (Easter gives the Eucharist special meaning: At that meal we swallow the life of Him who swallowed death for us....in our thanksgiving celebration, we swallow the death of death.

**CONCLUSION:**

--**Easter is the holiday that takes the sting out of death.** It connects our inborn longing for eternity with resurrection reality. But we must connect ourselves personally to that reality by faith in Jesus Christ-- Rom 10:9, ...if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

1 Cor 15:54-57, {54} When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." {55} "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" {56} The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. {57} But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.