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DEATH OF DEATH

"In this world, nothing is certain except death and taxes," said Benjamin Franklin. Some anonymous wag added, "At least we don't have to die every year on April 15."

Everyone faces death. But why? God tells us in the Bible that death is the result of mankind's sin, our rebellion against God. "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). "Sin came into the world through one man, Adam, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned" (Romans 5:12).

Death is deserved. We sin because we are sinners, and the penalty for sin is death. Our sins earn us death. Our death is owed to God, who is perfectly holy. If God did not require payment for sin, He would not be holy, not worthy of worship, not God. Our death is sure, because we are finite, temporal creatures. We rebel against our holy Creator. We sin. We earn the consequences.

Someone says, but if God is loving and perfect, surely He could do something about death? He has. The rest of Romans 6:23 says "The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Holy Week is all about the death of death. It's the fulfillment of the Old Testament, the climax of human history, the watershed of God's grace to mankind, the payment of The Debt. It's "being redeemed."

Palm Sunday is the coronation of Jesus as King, coming in the name of the Lord. Palms and psalms gave Him a royal welcome as the Messiah, the One promised throughout the Old Testament, to come and set His people free from the bondage of sin.

Maundy Thursday is the confirmation of Jesus as the Passover lamb "which takes away the sin of the world." Passover remembered how God rescued His enslaved people from Egypt. The sacrificed lamb pictures the wages of sin as death. It was also a picture of atonement, of God accepting payment for sin. That Passover became the presentation of Christ in the Lord's Supper, as Jesus prepares Himself as the "lamb of God" so that His own body and blood would make the payment.

Throughout human history, since Adam and Eve sinned in the garden of Eden, God had promised an offspring who would reconcile rebellious people with His holiness. The Old Testament sacrifices served as a recurring object lesson of God's redemption and His promise to save. Finally Jesus, God's one and only Son, came in a cradle in order to go to the cross. He lived a perfect life, in order to be a perfect sacrifice. In the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus confirmed His resolve to personally pay the debt we could not pay. Then He was arrested, tried and condemned at the hands of the religious leaders and Roman authorities. All part of God's plan. Read about it in John 19.

Good Friday is the day of redemption. Jesus was lifted up on the Roman cross of execution, crucified in a cruel tortuous death of the only perfect man who committed not even one sin. "He Himself bore our sins in His body" (1 Peter 2:24). God turned His face away from His one and only beloved Son. Then Jesus said, "it is finished" and bowed His head and gave up His spirit. Jesus was dead. The guards thrust a spear in His side to make sure. Pronounced dead by the Romans, Jesus was placed in a tomb by Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus.

Jesus said, "It is finished." And what that really means is that Jesus had "paid in full" the debt for sin. The great drama of redemption had been fulfilled. The price was paid, His life for yours. That's redemption.

Thank God the story does not end there. Jesus is dead. But that's not the death of Jesus. It's the death of death. It's Good Friday, but Easter Sunday is coming! Because Jesus died, all who put their trust in Him receive His payment for their sins, and fear death no more. And because Jesus lives, well, that's what we'll talk about next week...