

Birthday Blessing

R. Stanley, 1 February 2021



We make either too much of Birthdays or too little. Celebrations are overdone when commercialised. As a reaction, folks with a conservative mindset ignore the significance of even legitimate enjoyment. February is the most welcome month for me among the twelve. The obvious reason is that I was born on the 13th of February and my wife Lilian on the 22nd! I hold the view that the Rebirthday which speaks of spiritual birth is more important than the Birthday which is physical. Nevertheless, where is Rebirth without Birth? The Birthday brings us into God's beautiful world; the Rebirthday enrolls us in His blessed Kingdom. Except Adam, Eve and Melchizedek, all have Birthdays (Heb 7:3). Out of academic interest I googled to find out the famous folks born in February: Thomas Alva Edison (11 Feb 1846) who invented phonograph, light bulb and motion picture camera; Galileo Galilei (15 Feb 1564) whose work in the field of Physics was groundbreaking; George Washington (22 Feb 1732) the first US President, who is a towering figure in American history. Do google for your month of birth!

The purpose of this Article is to briefly study from the Bible the significance of Birthdays and how to remember them. I spent about ten days in browsing through various Scripture passages relating to this subject. It was a fascinating exercise. This is not a doctrinal essay. You are free to accept or reject it, summarily or selectively. I have just written down what I understand from the Bible as to how much we can enjoy the *Birthday Blessing* and extol the Name of God in this context. Even if you are basically opposed to any sort of celebration of Birthdays, do go through this Article. I assure you that you would be helped somehow. Do turn to the Scripture references.

God's purpose

Birthdays are a sacred occasion to thank God for bringing us into this world. We are all basically "God's offspring" and we have our very "being" in Him (Acts 17:28). Our birth was not an accident. It was ordained by God. The Song of Moses celebrates the Almighty as the Rock who "begot" us and the God who "fathered" us (Dt 32:18). We are admonished not to forget Him or become unmindful of Him. On every Birthday we must renew our acknowledgement of the fact that we are here on earth according to God's eternal purpose and not by chance.

From the womb

In fact, God has known us even before our birth, even before we were formed in our mother's womb. The very first words of God to Prophet Jeremiah when He called him were, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you were born I set you apart" (Jer 1:4,5). This was the case with Samson also. The Angel of the Lord told his mother that he would be a Nazarite to God "from the womb" (Judg

13:5,7). Hear Apostle Paul's testimony: "God separated me from my mother's womb and called me through His grace" (Gal 1:15). God wills even the "children who would be born" to be His witnesses on earth from generation to generation (Psa 78:6).

Good stature

Nothing in life must be taken for granted. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from Above, and comes down from the Father of Lights" (Js 1:17). I must reverently thank Him that I was born without any defect. Psalmist David lifted his heart towards the Lord, singing, "You have formed my inward parts; You have covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made, marvellous are Your works" (Psa 139:13,14). And he adds, "That my soul knows very well!" David must have thankfully remembered this everyday when the lame Mephibosheth was carried to his dining table (2 Sam 9:10-13). Patriarch Job's understanding was equally profound: "Your hands have made me and fashioned me, an intricate unity, ... You have granted me life and favour, and Your care has preserved my spirit" (Job 10:8a,12). It was this understanding that made him "eyes to the blind, and feet to the lame" (29:15). The marvels of human body are fantastic. No modern camera can anywhere come near the marvels of the human eye! No computer can compete with the intricacy of the human brain! No pump can work tirelessly without maintenance for years together like the human heart! And much more. Even Solomon the wise wondered how bones were formed in the womb (Eccl 11:5).

Babies with deformities

The realisation of the need to ceaselessly thank God for birthing me without any deformity dawned brilliantly on me during the years (1971-1975) I worked in the Christian Medical College Hospital, Vellore, as a Building Engineer. My heart ached when I saw mothers on the corridors with tears carrying their babies born with defects from the gynaecological ward. Blind eyes, cleft lips, withered hands, twisted feet, O my! Wholesome babies are not because of the saintliness of the parents, nor birth defects due to the sins of the father or the mother. Most of us have this stupid thinking. Jesus corrected this long long ago (Jn 9:1-3). The first healing miracle of the early Church was on a man born lame (Acts 3:1-10). The miracle healing of a born cripple impacted an entire city (14:1-18).

Generational Curse?

The doctrine of generational sin is outrightly unscriptural. God will punish children only if they as individuals "hate" Him (Ex 20:5). Children will not be judged for their fathers; each person is responsible and accountable for his own sin only (Dt 24:16; 2 Ki 14:6; 2 Chr 25:4). Only my teeth, not my children's, will be set on edge if I eat sour mangoes or raw tamarind (Ezek 18:1-4,19,20). Do not undermine the blessings of the New Covenant (Jer 31:29-34; Heb 8:8-12; 10:16,17). Among

David's great grandparents were Tamar an incestuous woman and Rahab a professional prostitute (Mt 1:3,5). Steer clear of any preacher who teaches generational curse. He will have several other doctrinal errors and blunders too. The Biblical truth is that the children are holy even if the parents are ungodly (1 Cor 7:14).

Next time you see a transgender or a dwarf, please do not look down upon them. Do not show face. Imagine yourself in their position and show compassion. Daniel was an eunuch (Dan 1:3,7; Mt 19:12). Angel Gabriel told him, "You are greatly beloved" (Dan 9:23). Zacchaeus was a dwarf. How much Jesus loved him and called him a "son of Abraham" (Lk 19:3,9). Being the class-topper and the class leader, I treated with contempt a classmate with hunch-back (1960). I went to his house to apologise to him and his parents when I was born again (1962). Dr. John Haggai, Founder of the US based Haggai Institute, where Christian leaders and managers from all over the world go for Advanced Leadership Training, used to bring his brain-damaged son (1950-1974) on a wheelchair for special gatherings. Mr. Augustine Asir, Founder of Word for the World, has a 40-year old son born with cerebral palsy, confined to wheelchair. It was Mr. Augustine who translated for Dr. Billy Graham in his Madras Crusade, 1977. Visit Blind Schools, Deaf and Dumb Schools, Homes for the Disabled and Retarded, and Orphanages on your Birthdays with goodies to cheer them up and thank God for your fit body. Think also of the innocent babies born with AIDS, and those recovered from garbage by ministries like the Missionaries of Charity of Mother Teresa.

Birth defects

I've witnessed infant deaths and attended the funerals of still-born babies (Job 3:16; Psa 58:8b). I could hardly control my tears seeing the parents. Premature births are not uncommon. Apostle Paul was perhaps a premature baby (1 Cor 15:8). How much the parents suffer to bring up such babies! Let's also sympathise with women in the pool of tears because of miscarriages. Years ago the deliveries were conducted right at home by midwives. Hardly anyone went to the hospital. My unmarried maternal aunt, 1911-1989, as a Nurse-cum-Midwife, must have conducted thousands of deliveries at homes in Virudhunagar, which include several family members of the then Chief Minister Mr. K. Kamaraj. As a family of Doctors, my parents-in-law decided to conduct Lilian's delivery (1972) at home. It was a dry and difficult delivery, and in the process our daughter Evangeline's right hand got injured. Till this day her right hand is shorter and weaker. What an agony we have gone through! Lilian is a Paediatrician! Besides Biblical understanding, these life examples have taught me how to thank God, especially on my Birthday, for my physical stature. Be satisfied with how God has made you, fair or dark, tall or short, slim or flabby, and whatever. God knows what's best for you. Never ever compare yourself with others. Beauty is only skindeep!

Birthpain

Birthdays are also an occasion to gratefully remember our mothers. There's perhaps nothing worse than labour pain. This is part of the "curse of the fall" which is not lifted yet (Gen 3:16). We are now redeemed from the "curse of the Law" only (Gal 3:10,13; Rom 8:19-23). There are numerous references to birthpain in the Bible (Isa 13:8; 21:3; 42:14; Jer 13:21; 22:23; Hos 13:13; Mic 4:10; Gal 4:19). Jesus compared the coming Great Tribulation to birthpain (Mt 24:8; Mk 13:8; Jn 16:21). This was Pauline thinking too (1 Thess 5:2,3). It's purely God's mercy that saved our mothers in labour (1 Tim 2:14,15). How many sleepless nights they must have had holding us in their gentle arms against their bosom! How many permanent gynaecological problems they have developed following a couple of deliveries! Someone said, "If men were to bring forth babies, they would not opt for a second child!" God compares His love to that of a nursing mother (Isa 49:15). Whenever possible we visit my Mom's tomb which is in Vellore on my Birthday in order to thank God for her. Sentimentality is not anti-spirituality! (Acts 2:29). Those who criticize visits to cemeteries will be the first to join an Israel tour to see after all an "empty" tomb!

Mummy, Daddy

There are babies who never saw their mothers (Isa 37:3). Maternal mortality is still high in rural India. Apostle Paul's great grandfather Benjamin's mother Rachel died at confinement (Gen 35:18). Call or visit your parents if they are alive, especially your mother, to thank them for their selfless endeavour in bringing you up to this stage. Honouring them in such ways will bless your days (Eph 6:1-3; Ex 20:12). Failure to commend them may amount to cursing them (Isa 45:10). Sit with them to listen to your birth history. Our parents would have prayed so much before our birth. Isaac "pleaded with the Lord" for Rebekah to conceive (Gen 25:21). Hannah wept in prayer with bitterness and anguish for a child (1 Sam 1:10,20). Zacharias and Elizabeth kept praying for a child even beyond childbearing age (Lk 1:5-7,13,36). Unlike us, the parents of old acknowledged the arrival of each child as a gift from "God." It was "God" who gave Isaac (= laughter) to Abraham (Josh 24:3). He brought laughter to a lamenting family (Gen 21:5,6). "God" gave Jacob and Esau to Isaac (Josh 24:4). Jacob told Esau that it was "God" who graciously gave him his children (Gen 33:5). Joseph told Jacob, "These are my sons whom **God** has given me" (48:9). Children are a heritage "from the Lord" and the fruit of the womb is "His" reward (Psa 127:3). The "*Happy Birthday*" song was originally composed by two American sisters, Mildred Hill (1859-1916) and Patty Hill (1868-1946), who were educators and musicians. To their two stanzas is now added another meaningful one: "*We are glad God made you, We are glad God made you; We are s-o-o-o glad God made you; Happy Birthday to you!*" Find out from your parents what promise(s) they made to God before or on your arrival. If you are pregnant, pray regularly for God to touch the baby which grows in your womb. John was filled with the Holy Spirit even while in his mother's womb (Lk 1:15).

Jesus' Birthday

Some modern puritans consider Birthday celebrations carnal. See how God celebrated His Son's Birthday. How many visitors He sent to see the Babe! Angels from Above! Shepherds from around! Wise men from afar! The angel of the Lord said it was "good tidings of great joy" (Lk 2:9,10). A multitude of the heavenly army sang, "Glory to God in the Highest!" (vv13,14). God the Father kissed His Baby saying, "Today I have begotten You!" This Birthday greetings from the Father occur four times in the Bible (Psa 2:7; Acts 13:33; Heb 1:5; 5:5). Look at God's Birthday gift promised to His Son: "You are My Son. Today I have begotten You. Ask Me, and I will give You the Nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession" (Psa 2:7,8). It was because Jesus remembered this Birthday promise of His Dad, He despised the devil's offer (Mt 4:8-10).

Greetings & Gifts

Celebration of Birthdays and such important days is not anti-Biblical. Baptist John's birthday was an occasion of "joy and gladness" for the "neighbours and relatives" (Lk 1:14,57,58). Even for the weaning day of Isaac, Abraham made a "great feast" (Gen 21:8). Spiritually-minded parents can remind their sons and daughters on their birthdays the great things God has done in their lives since birth. Recollection of ancestry helps maintain the historical links. Paul reminded Timothy of his granny (2 Tim 1:5). No one is too old to desire Birthday gifts. Caleb on his 85th birthday asked Joshua for a mountain (Josh 14:10-12). Remember to greet your friends and relatives wholeheartedly on their birthdays. Greetings through SMS or WhatsApp or E-mail cannot come anywhere near Birthday Cards. Your handwriting of your name and that of the Birthday Baby will make it highly personal. You can even go for your own handmade Cards. I am safely keeping several Cards received from friends over the years. The world is turning more and more impersonal: No "natural affection" (Rom 1:31; 2 Tim 3:3). No friendship in the community! No fellowship in the Church! Let's swim against the tide to make our relationships as personal as possible. The apostles preferred personal visits even to handwritten letters (2 Jn 12; 3 Jn 13,14). Beloved, where are we heading?

Birthday Parties

Birthday dinners can be profitably used as a testimony time. Besides relatives, invite neighbours, friends and colleagues. You can briefly explain to them how God has led you thus far through mountains and valleys, ups and downs, days of prosperity and adversity. Tell them also the need to be born again. On our Birthday we were born "in sin," inheriting sinful nature from our parents, even from the first man Adam (Psa 51:5; Rom 5:19). On our Rebirthday we are saved "from sin." That's the message of the greatest Birthday in history (Mt 1:21). Do not sermonize but simply testify pleasantly. Feasts have played a positive role in Bible history (Gen

29:22; Judg 14:10; Esth 2:18). It was in a wedding feast Jesus performed His first sign miracle (Jn 2:1-11). Matthew hosted a dinner for his colleagues from the Income-tax Office when he resigned his job to enter fulltime ministry. I'm sure he must have explained why he decided to leave the cash counter and link to a Carpenter (Lk 5:27-29). Jesus enjoyed feasts. That's why folks called Him a glutton (Mt 11:19). Even in Heaven we will have a feast and that would be the grandest ever (Rev 19:9; Isa 25:6).

Dinner for the Poor

There can be more than one dinner connected to your Birthday. Arrange one exclusively for the poor and the downtrodden. It was to one of His hosts Jesus said, "When you give a dinner or a supper, do not invite your friends, your brothers, your relatives, nor your rich neighbours, lest they also invite you back, and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; but you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just" (Lk 14:12-14). I do not take this passage to mean a dinner for the poor "instead of" a dinner for friends but "besides." Let's bring this practice into the mainstream.

Famous Men & Women

Remembering the Birthdays of great men and women, whether spiritual or secular, also adds a noble dimension to life. Martin Luther was born on 10 November 1483; Billy Graham, 7 November 1918; William Carey, 17 August 1761; Sadhu Sundersingh, 3 September 1889; Mother Teresa, 26 August 1910; and so on. Mahatma Gandhi's Birthday, 2 October 1869, is observed as International Day of Non-violence; Dr. S. Radhakrishnan's Birthday, 5 September 1888, Teachers Day; Jawaharlal Nehru's Birthday, 14 Nov 1889, Children's Day; Subhas Chandrabose's Birthday, 23 January 1897, National Day of Patriotism; Dr. Abdul Kalam's Birthday, 15 October 1931, World Students Day; and the like. The sad thing is that when we hold Christian programmes on these National holidays, we don't even make a mention of these personalities. Have we become too heavenly-minded to be of any earthly use?

Ancestry

Our children and youngsters are near-totally delinked from the knowledge of ancestry. Parents must spend time with them on their birthdays to say a few helpful things from the lives of the forefathers. I'm sure Mother Mary did it to Jesus whose thirty Birthdays were celebrated in the carpenter's home in Nazareth (Lk 3:23). Look at these words which spontaneously flowed out of her heart in her song, Luke 1:46-55, "*generation to generation ... our fathers ... Abraham and his seed.*" The genealogy we have on the first page of the New Testament and the third chapter of Luke would have been in her fingertips. (What Matthew gives is Jesus' ancestry

through Joseph, and what Luke gives is His ancestry through Mary. Hence the difference between the two records.) I can imagine Hannah reminding little Samuel of God's mercy through generations, whenever she visited him, perhaps around his birthday, year after year, with her hand-stitched dress for him (1 Sam 2:1-10,19). Yes, beloved, the best Birthday gift we can give our children is the knowledge of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, "who remembered us in our lowly state" (Psa 136:23).

Photo Albums & Diaries

The family photo album will be extremely useful if the members sit around turning its pages. Immortal memories would inspire each one. Digital storage of pictures is convenient but it cannot better substitute albums. Keep colour printouts of the images from your mobile or computer. You are at an immense disadvantage if you have forsaken the habit of diary-writing. Visits, incidents, divine encounters and the like would take you on the memory lane filling your heart with delightful surprise and joyful praise (Psa 103:1,2). Albums and diaries make Birthday celebrations profoundly meaningful. Write down in your diary your Birthday decisions of this year. Your review next year would effectually help renewal and rededication. It will be an annual assessment. Every year on his birthday David Livingstone (1813-1873), the Missionary Explorer to Africa, repeated his covenant with his Master. Jesus never went back from His Birthday commitment to His Father (Heb 10:5,6; Psa 40:6-8). Because every Birthday brings us one year closer to the day of our departure from here, it's an occasion to deepen our commitment and hasten our work (Psa 39:4,5; Jn 9:4).

Patriotism

Personally I thank God on my Birthday for the privilege of being born in India, and that too in a Southern village which bears the name of the city in which Jesus grew (Lk 2:51,52). In fact I am proud of my Indian citizenship like Apostle Paul was over his Roman citizenship (Acts 22:27,28). God has taken me with the Bible to so many Nations around the world. I love all countrymen but I start missing my motherland too soon, like the Jews and Srilankans (Compare Psa 137:1-4). God's predetermination concerning our place of birth, growth and work cannot be taken lightly (Psa 87:5,6). My place of initial spiritual growth (1963-1968) was Karaikudi, a town known for its spiritual and climatic dryness. God trained me in that wilderness for a nationwide ministry ahead. I keep thanking Him for the problems we do not have in this country instead of complaining. As a Mission person I deplore the evangelical brain-drain from India seeking greener pastures. The loss for the Indian Church and the Indian Missions is heavy.

Gifts & Talents

On our Birthdays we must thank God specifically for the natural talents and the spiritual gifts He has bestowed on us. There are born artists, born teachers, born

leaders, born orators, and so on (Gen 25:27; Ex 2:2; Judg 3:15; 1 Chr 12:2). We all have our inborn characteristics, some desirable but others detestable. We are normally more aware of our good qualities than the bad ones. Because whatever we have received from God is out of His sheer grace, there's nothing to boast of. God challenges us, "Who distinguishes you from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you glory as if you had not received it?" (1 Cor 4:7). We must take a stock of whether or not we have faithfully used the God-given talents and gifts, small or big. As we come to the evening of our life, if we had been in leadership responsibilities, we must be able to gracefully pass on the baton to the nextliner(s) as Moses did on his 120th Birthday (Dt 31:1-6).

What's in a name?

We must also thank God for our names given at birth. Do not ask, What's in a name? Several Biblical names were characteristic. There are individuals named before they were born: Ishmael (Gen 16:11), Isaac (17:19), Josiah (1 Ki 13:2), Solomon (1 Chr 22:9), Cyrus (Isa 44:28), John (Lk 1:13), Jesus (Mt 1:21). We have also instances where God changed the names of persons: Abram → Abraham (Gen 17:5), Sarai → Sarah (v15), Jacob → Israel (32:27,28), Simon → Peter (Jn 1:42). When God wants to say something extremely important, He double-calls the name: Abraham (Gen 22:11), Jacob (46:2), Moses (Ex 3:4), Samuel (1 Sam 3:10), Martha (Lk 10:41), Simon (22:31), Saul (Acts 9:4). I was named Stanley by my god-mother, Dr. Mrs. Vethabothagam (1896-1949), a pioneer of St. Luke's Hospital, Nazareth. She desired that I become a preacher like Dr. E. Stanley Jones (1884-1973) and a soldier like the British war veteran, Sir Stanley Maude (1864-1917). Daddy was both. The meaning of "Stanley" is "Stony Meadow." I ask the Lord to keep me strong in Him and tender towards people. Ministerially I keep laying stony foundation for God's people by feeding them on green pastures. My brother, two years younger to me, is my only sibling. My parents named him as "Christopher," meaning "Christ-bearer." Lilian and I named our only begotten daughter as "Evangeline" after our passion for evangelism. I urge Parents to select names prayerfully for the children.

Individual's discretion

Each day of our life is precious. Nevertheless, Psalm 118:24 becomes specifically meaningful on our Birthdays: "This is the day which the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it!" We can join David to worshipfully confess before God, "You crown the year with Your goodness, and Your paths drip with abundance" (Psa 65:11). Again, "O Lord, by You I have been upheld from my birth; You are He who took me out of my mother's womb. My praise shall be continually of You" (71:6). Grown-ups may think that celebrating Birthdays is only for children and it is childishness, but I consider it childlikeness! The celebrations of "babies and infants" bless the adults also with an atmosphere of praise and worship. After reading through this write-up, you may still feel that it's just not necessary to

attach any glowing importance to Birthdays. I respect your view because Apostle Paul has taught us: “One person esteems one day above another; another esteems everyday alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind” (Rom 14:5). You can offer the following prayer if you desire to celebrate your Birthday praising God —

Birthday Prayer

“O God of yesterday, today and forever, You who knows me even before the appearance of the world, and before I was formed in my mother’s womb, I bow at Your feet this day when I begin another year in my life. I cannot praise You enough for all Your mercy and love towards me all these years, especially the last year. It’s by Your grace that I am not destroyed till today. There is no end for Your mercies. They are new every morning.

“I acknowledge with shame that the obedience and holiness You expected were not seen in my life. Forgive me, Lord. How many times I shut my ears to Your gentle voice! I did not heed to Your warnings and did not spend sufficient time in meditating Your Holy Word. Daily prayer has become a hasty mass. My involvement in Your glorious work is inadequate. How many unnecessary words have I spoken! My sins are countless. Heavenly Father, forgive me. Wash me. Do not be angry with me.

“Lord, I rededicate myself to You. I resolve today to be swift in obeying You, to guard holiness within and without, to show love in my relationships with fellow humans, to be systematic in prayer and meditation, and to have deeper involvement in the missionary activities. Grant me Your Spirit to carry out without break the resolutions I have made this day. Lord, protect me from anything that may come between You and me.

“Lord, I thank You for my family members, teachers, helpers, elders and friends, who have been a blessing in my life in the past and now. Reward them for the good things they have done for me. I praise You and pray for my parents. Cause me to honour them always.

“Loving Father, graciously take care of my future. Fulfil the purpose for which You have caused me to be born in this world. Let me not forget all Your benefits towards me. Father, let this day be a day of praise to You and happiness to me and to others. In Jesus’ Name I pray. Amen!”

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