

A Birthday Used for Spiritual Good

"And it came to pass the third day, which was Pharaoh's birthday, that he made a feast unto all his servants: and he lifted up the head of the chief butler and of the chief baker among his servants." – Genesis 40:20

Summary:

Pharaoh's birthday became an occasion for mercy and judgment, reminding us that birthdays may reveal either human pride or godly reflection. Scripture records celebrations corrupted by drunkenness, vanity, and cruelty, yet the custom itself may be used lawfully and profitably. A birthday should lead us to thank God for life and preservation, humble ourselves for sin and neglected privileges, reflect on life's brevity and uncertainty, and pray for wisdom, mercy, grace, and readiness for death. Faith changes the meaning of both birth and death: without hope, another year brings only deeper dread, but in Christ it brings the believer nearer to the heavenly home.

Outline:

1. **Providence rules over every life**

- The butler's promotion and the baker's death occurred under God's governing hand.

2. **Celebration can become an occasion for sin**

- Royal birthdays often displayed drunkenness, pride, cruelty, and forgetfulness of God.

3. A birthday should inspire gratitude and humility

- We should thank God for life and preservation while remembering our sins and neglected privileges.

4. A birthday should prompt reflection and prayer

- The passing years call us to consider death, seek wisdom and grace, and prepare for every duty and trial.

5. Faith transforms our view of birth and death

- The unbelieving heart dreads existence, but the believer can bless God for life and rejoice in approaching glory.

Text

If the chief butler was wrongly accused and the chief baker was rightly accused, God's providence was evident in vindicating one and punishing the other. If both were equally innocent or guilty, Pharaoh's ruling reflected the randomness of a ruler wielding absolute power—some might say, "He slew whom he pleased and spared whom he pleased." He may have aimed to demonstrate both mercy and justice to his subjects, choosing his birthday for this purpose.

Princes' birthdays have traditionally honoured their sovereignty, but these occasions have often been misused, leading to corruption and harm. This is evident in Israel's king, whose birthday celebration devolved into excess. His drunkenness damaged his health and diminished his dignity as he mingled with mockers and entertainers: "In the day of our king the princes have made him sick with bottles of wine; he stretched out his hand with scorners."

What occurred during a similar event with Herod? "Herod hosted a banquet on his birthday for his nobles, high officials, and leading citizens of Galilee." Herodias's daughter performed a dance, which delighted the king, leading to John's execution.

Nonetheless, nearly everyone celebrates their birthdays in some way. The practice is acceptable when done rightly and can be beneficial. Our devout ancestors used the day for family affection, congratulations, and meaningful, spiritual contemplation. A birthday should primarily be a day of gratitude to the Creator and Giver of life. We ought to thank Him for our existence, our place in creation, the country and family we were born into, our civil and religious rights, and for protecting us through numerous dangers when many others have been lost.

It should also be a day of humility. We were formed in iniquity and born in sin. We have been wayward since birth. Our

sins are countless, and our wrongdoings have reached up to heaven. We have not fulfilled our responsibilities properly. As a result, we must admit, "I do remember my faults this day."

A birthday serves as a moment for reflection. Just as there is a time to be born, there is also a time to die. Much of life has already slipped by like a shadow. When a few more years pass, we will take the journey from which we cannot return. Our remaining days are as fleeting as they are uncertain. We might never see this birthday again; and if we don't, where will we be when it comes around again?

It should also be a day of prayer: that we may count our days and direct our hearts to wisdom; that we may obtain mercy and grace for renewal; that we may be ready for all duties and trials ahead; and that, whether we live or die, we may belong to the Lord.

Blessed are those who accept their current life without complaints or impatience, understanding that their death will be a gain rather than a loss. For them, living means embodying Christ, and dying offers eternal reward. Each birthday reminds them that they are one step closer to their heavenly home. Conversely, it is tragic for those who, if they reflect, see each year distancing them from what they cherish and drawing them nearer to a world they neither hope for nor wish to join.

Unless one's conscience is dulled and all serious thoughts are pushed aside by company and entertainment, a birthday can seem far from joyful for such individuals. They might write verses, receive congratulations, and smile, but even in laughter, their hearts are heavy, and the gaiety ends in gloom. Consider the contrast between two men discussing their birth:

Voltaire stated, "Who can, without horror, consider the whole world as the empire of destruction? It abounds with wonders; it also abounds with victims. It is a vast field of carnage and contagion."

He continued: "Every species is relentlessly hunted and torn apart through earth, air, and water. Humans are more miserable than all other animals combined. They love life but are aware of their mortality. When they experience fleeting happiness, they also endure many hardships and ultimately decay. This awareness sets humans apart; other animals lack this consciousness."

Voltaire observed that humans, during their brief lives, often perpetuate the misery they experience—killing for money, cheating and being cheated, robbing and being robbed, serving just to command, and feeling remorseful for their actions. He depicted humanity as a guilty and suffering crowd, with the world filled with more dead than alive. He ultimately expressed, 'I tremble at this dreadful picture, and I wish I had never been born.'

Listen to the inspiring words of Thomas Halyburton, who passed away confidently trusting in God: "Soon, I will see God in a way unlike any before, and I will be prepared to praise Him forever. The thoughts of God become flesh are deeply sweet and breathtaking. I am amazed I do not love and admire Him more! It is astonishing that I remain so calm despite bodily pain and even in the face of death."

He continued: "It's a mercy that, while I still have my reason, I can proclaim his goodness to my soul. I yearn for his salvation. I praise his name because I have found him and die happy in him. Blessed be God that I was born! I long to be with him. I have a father, mother, and ten brothers and sisters in heaven, and I will be the eleventh. There is a story in this providence, and I will tell it forever."

Halyburton concluded, and expressed, "If there is such glory in God's dealings with me now, what will it be to see the Lamb in the midst of the throne? Blessed be God that ever I was born."

This sermon is taken from William Jay's devotional, *Morning and Evening Exercises* (January 14, Morning), first published in 1854.