**HAPPY BIRTHDAY**

***The Most Important Day of My Life***

April 26, 1964 was the most important day of my life.

Other days have been red-letter dates on my calendar, such as my wedding (6/17/77) and the births of my children (6/22/83 - 4/30/85 - 10/29/88). But the most important day of my life happened 57 years ago yesterday. That was the day I confessed Christ to be my Savior and was baptized and added to the church by God (Acts 2:38,47).

Do you know the day you were baptized? It’s your birthday. Or, to be more accurate, it’s your re-birth day. While my mom will surely remember with fondness (or, more likely, with agony) the day I was born, I have no recollection of that historic event. But I have very vivid memories of that day at the Winchester Road church of Christ in Memphis, Tennessee when I went forward at the song of invitation and asked to be baptized. Before that large audience I made the good confession (Rom. 10:9-10), acknowledged my sins (Ac. 17:30), and was immersed in water (Ac. 8:37-39) to wash away my sins (Ac. 22:16; 3:19) and then arise to walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:3-6). I said all that in order to say this, I was ***born again***!

Jesus told a prominent Jewish leader named Nicodemus who had come at night to ask Him questions that “*unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God*” (Jn. 3:3). This startled him. He was thinking only of the physical realm as he asked, “*How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born*?” (Jn. 3:4). Jesus forced him to search deeper by declaring, “*Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God*” (Jn. 3:5). The rest of the sermon he heard that day (read John 3) would sit heavy on Nicodemus’ heart for many months. On the fateful day when Christ was crucified, when all His disciples had deserted Him, Nicodemus stepped forward with courage to declare his faith by attending to the burial of Christ (Jn. 19:39).

It seems to me that we can necessarily infer this Pharisee had indeed been “*born again*” and entered the kingdom of God. I sure hope we all meet him on the resurrection morning. But in order to do that we must be born again too. Which brings me back to my birthday.

I have a book in my library written by the famous evangelist Billy Graham. The book is titled *How To Be Born Again*. First published in 1977 it made publishing history by printing and selling 800,000 copies in its initial press run. It has since sold millions of copies over the past 44 years. I spent time reading it (again) in order to better understand what made Mr. Graham so popular. What did he actually say was required to be “*born again*?”

I searched in vain through the 220 pages to find even one word about baptism. He never mentioned it! Not once. “*Water*” was never said to be the waters of baptism, in spite of the fact that Jesus had clearly said that one MUST be born “*of water and the Spirit to enter the kingdom of heaven*.” If that is what Jesus said, why was it so hard for Mr. Graham to emphasize the same elements of the birth process?

His official webpage stated that Billy Graham had been the spiritual adviser to every U. S. President from Harry Truman to Barack Obama. That’s 12 presidents! It was also said that over 3,200,000 people had responded to his invitation at his 400+ *Billy Graham Crusades* given in 185 countries on six different continents. It says that during his over 60 years of preaching he had spoken to over 2.2 billion people around the world. “*Because of his crusades Billy Graham preached the gospel to more people in person than anyone in the history of Christianity*.”

If only…

If only Mr. Graham had preached, like Paul, “*the whole counsel of God*” (Ac. 20:26). In his desire to promote unity among all who professed Christ, Billy Graham refused to reveal the full gospel of how to be born again. Those 3.2 million souls that “responded to his invitation” to accept Christ in their heart as their personal Savior will come before the Judge and cry out, “Lord, Lord, did we not accept You and become born again?” – to which He will declare, “*Depart from Me*” (Matt. 7:21-23). I’m so sorry that Billy Graham, with all his vast influence, could not bring himself to preach the simple gospel of “*he who believes and is baptized shall be saved*” (Mk. 16:16).

When I witnessed Michelle Walley be immersed in water for the remission of her sins last Wednesday night, I saw a soul truly be “*born again*.” April 21, 2021 became her new birthday! She is now called by Peter a “*newborn babe*” in Christ (I Pet. 2:2). She did something that those 3.2 million will wish they had done come Judgment Day. She did something that Mr. Graham will wished he had preached to those 2.2 billion in 185 countries on 6 continents. He had preached a perverted gospel that saved no one (Gal. 1:6-9), for the Bible makes clear that in the preaching of “*Jesus*” it must include the critical question, “*see, here is water, what hinders me from being baptized*” (Ac. 8:36)? That Ethiopian nobleman could not “*go on his way rejoicing*” until he first “*went down into the water and he baptized him*” (Ac. 8:38). Neither can you.

While I was physically born over 68 years ago to my earthly father and mother, I now celebrate with far more happiness my spiritual birthday in which I was born to my heavenly Father by the action of the Holy Spirit in the waters of baptism. On that red-letter day I was cleansed of all my sins and appealed to God to give me a clean conscience (I Pet. 3:21). On that wonderful birthday I received “*the gift of the Holy Spirit*” (Ac 2:38), and “*the times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord*” (Ac 3:19). Truly, it was a day I will never forget. I mean, who forgets their birthday?

Happy birthday Michelle. So, when is your birthday?

If you have not been born again you now have the opportunity on this side of eternity to follow Michelle into the waters of baptism. What hinders you?

April 26, 1964 – the most important day of my life.

What is yours? - Rick