

"HAPPY BIRTHDAY!"

These words invoke all kinds of feelings. Depending on circumstances in one's life remembering the day of our birth has all the makings of being either a spectacular day or a day of sadness and sorrow, depending much on circumstances and one's own perspective in life.

For instance, from a time standpoint, a child's birthday has all the promise of excitement one can possibly enjoy in one day. Cake and ice cream, perhaps with a party, is the order of the day. And the gifts! The gifts! Such days for a child are few and far between, but when they come, what moments of excitement they are! Fast forward a few years and birthdays are seen in a new light. As they begin approaching with embarrassing and predictable speed, each passing birthday takes on a new meaning. Especially during those middle years of life when birthdays start showing on your face and body, the prospects of another birthday may take on some added dread. "All is vanity!" said the preacher. During the glory years of life, birthdays take on a meaning never considered before. With each passing year, the announcement of an advanced age becomes an achievement, like a laurel that is placed on one's head. The prospects of an approaching birthday are most exciting in view of the alternative.

Depending on the struggles we have in life remembering the day of our birth can take on a negative meaning. Some endure so much affliction that they rue the day they were born. For instance, the prophet Jeremiah once said, "Cursed be the day on which I was born! The day when my mother bore me, let it not be blessed! Cursed be the man who brought the news to my father, 'A son is born to you,' making him very glad. Let that man be like the cities that the Lord overthrew without pity; let him hear a cry in the morning and an alarm at noon, because he did not kill me in the womb; so my mother would have been my grave, and her womb forever great. Why did I come out from the womb to see toil and sorrow, and spend my days in shame?" Jeremiahs 20:14-18. Without going into much detail, when Jeremiah wrote these words, he was having what we generally refer to as a "bad hair day." The old prophet had endured so much as a preacher. He had told Israel just what God wanted him to say, and the people hated it. They rejected it with such strong resistance that they had tried every way possible to quiet the mouth of the man of God. They put him in a hole, they kicked him out of the city, they beat him at least twice, and put him in stocks. The words said above were on just such an occasion.

You know life can throw some pretty rough things at you, sometimes leaving you in such despair that you may be tempted to think that it would have been better had you not been born. Jesus said, "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you," Matthew 5:11,12 (ESV). Times like these hopefully will pass with time and change of circumstances, but when facing hardship they can be so difficult. When hard times come, it is good to

remember that others have been there. They endured and overcame. So will you if you trust your God who will never fail you.

Birthdays are a blessing from God, because with them comes the potential of more time to live in praise and honor to His great and Holy Name. Look forward to them, enjoy them, and know that with every passing birthday we draw ever closer to being with God where every day will be a celebration!

—Scott