

Do you remember your birth day? * No, I don't mean *the date* you celebrate your birthday, * but the *actual day* of your birth. Do you recall that *experience* of being born into this world?

I'd guess that you probably you don't have a personal recollection of that day – that moment. You *know* it happened – your existence is living proof that it did – but it took a while (as in *years*) before you understood what happened to you.

Do you remember your *spiritual* birth day? Do you remember the *actual day* when you were born *again* (or *from above*), as Jesus described it in John 3? Do you remember the day when you became a follower of Jesus?

Some here this morning could stand up and identify that very moment they were convicted of their sin *and* their need to trust Jesus. They could testify about the moment they were transferred from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's Son – the moment they went from being spiritually dead to spiritually alive – the day they experienced forgiveness.

And that moment may be associated with circumstances that stand out as well, such as the reading of a particular passage of Scripture, *or* going forward during an invitation, *or* by an immediate and dramatic change in your life. The day – even the moment of your conversion – is something you remember vividly.

But there are probably others whose experience of being born *again* is not as vivid. Granted, for all followers of Jesus, there *is* a moment when conversion happens – a moment in time when we go from being lost to being found, from being spiritually dead to being spiritually alive – just as there was a moment in time when we were physically born. But even though the miracle of conversion happens in a moment, it might not be as vivid to you as it is to others, for a variety of reasons, such as: your understanding of what happened didn't fully sink in until later, *or* the change that came to your life came more slowly, *or* it happened without any attendant circumstances that you can remember.

This morning we'll learn about some folks who were born again during the Paul's ministry in Ephesus. I can't say for sure that *every* one in Ephesus could remember the moment that they were born *again*, but I think I can say with

certainty, that at least of dozen or so of them could. Why do I say that?

[Turn to Acts 19]

Paul heading back toward Ephesus, a city he briefly visited near the end of his second missionary journey. Now on his way back to Ephesus, something unusual happened there before he arrived. As we saw last week, Apollos, a Jew from Alexandria, trained in the Scriptures, and a gifted communicator, came to Ephesus teaching about Jesus. While he knew *much* truth about Jesus, he didn't know *the whole* truth.

He was **acquainted only with the baptism of John** the Baptist, suggesting he was unfamiliar with Christian water baptism *or* the regenerating baptism of the Holy Spirit. Priscilla and Aquila carefully instructed him in the truth about Jesus that he was lacking, including, the truth about Jesus' death, resurrection, ascension, and sending of the Holy, who's our means of regeneration and placement into the body of Christ.

Apollos entered the city of Ephesus an Old Testament saint, but left a born again follower of Jesus. He entered the city believing the limited revelation he had about God and the Messiah, but left the city knowing the whole truth and trusting Jesus, having been baptized by the Holy Spirit. And he left Ephesus to teach that truth to others, including those in the city of Corinth.

Apollos wasn't the only follower of John the Baptist who came to Ephesus needing help. When Paul arrived there, he eventually met up with about a dozen others who were in the same boat Apollos had once been in.

Read v.1

***¹ It happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the upper country and came to Ephesus, and found some disciples.**

After passing through familiar territory, Paul finally reaches his intended destination: the city of **Ephesus** (about which we'll say more next week). Here, Paul encounters some **disciples**.

Disciples in what sense? If Luke's describing the state in which Paul met them, they were **disciples** of John the Baptist. If he's describing them in anticipation of what they were *about* to become, they are *soon-to-be* **disciples** of Jesus.

Paul *may*'ve met these **disciples** immediately upon his arrival. Or, he may have met them

during in the course of his 3 month ministry in the synagogue (which we'll get to later), *or* sometime later during his 2 plus years in Ephesus. Luke might just be arranging this encounter topically, not chronologically, to link it with the preceding events concerning Apollos, who was also acquainted with John the Baptist.

As Paul interacts with these disciples, he investigates their knowledge and experience. Perhaps something they said raised questions:

Read v.2

***² He said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" And they said to him, "No, we have not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit."**

Paul believed that those who believe in Jesus – who respond to Him in humility and faith – receive the promised Holy Spirit. Without the regenerating and baptizing work of the Spirit, we would be spiritually dead and eternally lost. That's why Paul could later write:

Read Romans 8:9b,16

***⁹ ...But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.**

So Paul asks them: *** "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?"** If someone were to ask *you* that question, how would you respond? This is how these disciples responded: *** "No, we have not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit."**

Not only had they *not* received the Holy Spirit, but they were unaware that the Spirit had arrived. I think *that's* how we're to understand the statement: **"we have not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit."** As we'll see in the next question and answer, they *had* to know about the promised Holy Spirit. They were not ignorant of His *existence*, only of His *arrival* as promised.

So Paul questions them further:

Read v.3

***³ And he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" And they said, "Into John's baptism."**

He asks regarding their baptism experience: *** "Into what then were you baptized?"** In other words, what was the significance of their baptism? What did it symbolize? What or who were they identifying with when baptized?

They respond to Paul, saying, **"Into John's baptism."** They were baptized in response to the John's preaching. And what was John's message? The significance of his baptism?

Read v.4

***⁴ Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus."**

John the Baptist was the forerunner of Jesus, calling people to repent of their sin in preparation for the coming of Jesus, the Messiah. His message was simple, and pointed to a baptism beyond the one he administered:

Read Mark 1:8

***⁸ "I baptized you with water; but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."**

While John's baptism was **with water**, the baptism Jesus would provide was **with the Holy Spirit**. John's baptism **with water** *pictured* the cleansing we yearn for, but only the baptism **with the Holy Spirit** could actually cleanse us and impart spiritual life. And only faith in Jesus would lead to such a baptism.

Like Apollos, these disciples needed the rest of the story about Jesus. Like Apollos, they were Old Testament saints living soon after the inauguration of the New Covenant. They were not Christians, *but not* because they were hard or unbelieving, *but* because they hadn't heard the truth about Jesus and what He accomplished on the cross and by sending of the Holy Spirit.

Paul no doubt elaborated *** on the whole truth about **Jesus** – as he often did. But Luke skips the elaboration, and goes right to the impact:

Read v.5

***⁵ When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.**

They were baptized again, this time with an understanding of who Jesus was. Actually, they were baptized twice in Ephesus. First with water, as Jesus instructed His disciples:

Read Matthew 28:19,20

¹⁹ "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Their *earlier* water baptism identified them with John's message, while *this* water baptism identified them with Jesus, His Father, and the Holy Spirit He'd send. But the second baptism they received in Ephesus was the most important: the baptism of the Holy Spirit:

Read v.6

***⁶ And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking with tongues and prophesying.**

They received the Holy Spirit. Normally it did (and does) come *without* the laying on of **hands** or the manifestations of **speaking with tongues and prophesying**. It usually happens apart from such externals, *and* at the moment we respond to Jesus in faith. But there are a several times in Acts when the Spirit's baptism is associated with manifestations, *not* because it was *necessary*, but because it was *beneficial*.

For example, in Acts 2, the Spirit's arrival was marked by incredible manifestations – by attention grabbing sights and sounds:

Read vs.2-4

***² And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting.³ And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them.⁴ And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance.**

God was letting everyone on the scene know that promised Spirit had arrived, as promised.

And in chapter 8, we *also* saw the unusual. When Philip preached to gospel to Samaritans (a *big* step forward in light of deep rooted tension between Jews and Samaritans) many Samaritans responded in faith to the gospel, yet did not seem to give evidence of possessing the Holy Spirit.

When the news reached Jerusalem, Peter and John were dispatched to check things out. I'm not sure what led the apostles to conclude that the Holy Spirit had *not* come upon them. Perhaps they were looking for a repeat of Pentecost. But whatever evidence they were looking for, it was missing from the report they got from Samaria. So they concluded that the Holy Spirit had not come upon them.

The normal pattern reflected in the New Testament (and continuing to this day), is that the Holy Spirit comes in conjunction with the exercising of saving faith. It's the Holy Spirit's influence that leads to conviction, repentance, and faith. It's the Spirit who infuses us with spiritual life and remains within us as God's mark of ownership. Salvation and the giving of the Holy Spirit go hand in hand.

So, what happens when Peter and John arrive in Samaria?

Read v.17

***¹⁷ Then they began laying their hands on them, and they were receiving the Holy Spirit.**

After the apostles prayed with them and laid hands on them, *then* the Samaritans received the Holy Spirit. God delayed their reception of the Spirit until the apostles' arrival and the laying on of their hands.

Why? I think it's a case of *God withholding the expected* (the giving of the Spirit to those who believe in Jesus) *to affirm the reality of the amazing* (even Samaritans can be saved, just like Jews). The delay in giving the Spirit to coincide with the arrival and touch of the apostles set the stage for mending the rift between Jews and Samaritans. It sent a message to both groups that old distinctions no longer existed for those who are one in Christ.

It's *possible* (though not stated) that the baptism of the Holy Spirit was also accompanied by special gifts, such as tongues or prophecy. But regardless of what *form* the evidence took, it was manifested in conjunction with the touch of the Apostles on this occasion.

Then in Acts 10, we see the Church reaching out to Gentiles, an even greater challenge for Jewish believers. What happened when Peter preached to gospel to Gentiles?

Read 10:44-48

***⁴⁴ While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message.⁴⁵ All the circumcised believers who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also.*⁴⁶ For they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God. Then Peter answered,⁴⁷ "Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have**

received the Holy Spirit just as we *did*, can he?" * 48 **And he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to stay on for a few days.**

As the church took this giant leap forward, the Spirit's presence was affirmed through special manifestations.

Such manifestations weren't occurring constantly, but at key moments in the Church's expansion: at Pentecost, with the addition of Samaritans, with the addition of Gentiles, and here in Acts 19, with the conversion of these disciples of John the Baptist who'd been in the dark about the complete story of Jesus.

The manifestations of the Spirit in Ephesus let the disciples of John know that the gospel given by Paul was true, and they were not longer under John's authority, but the authority of Jesus, and His apostles. These manifestations *also* served as a warning to Jews who were unresponsive to the gospel, that Paul's message was divinely authenticated.

Read v.7

* 7 **There were in all about twelve men.**

Some see symbolic significance in the number 12, but it may be nothing more than Luke being a good historian, relaying the most accurate information he has. Or the size of the group may simply be one reason for the drama surrounding their conversion. There's no record of it having happened with the conversion of Apollos, but it *did* happen with this group – and *did* happen when the Apostle Paul was on the scene.

You may or may not vividly remember the moment *you* were born again – when *you* were baptized by the Holy Spirit. But I don't think any of this *delighted dozen* ever forgot.

What's more important than remembering *the moment* you were born again, is that you know you that *you are indeed* born again – that you have experienced forgiveness of your sin through your faith in Christ – and that you have an ongoing and growing relationship with Jesus.

During college, in order to become a Resident Assistant at Moody, we had to counsel at Word of Life for the summer. It was an opportunity to bond with our fellow R.A.s, as well as gain experience in counseling leading young people under our care.

The camp provided several days of training for us before the campers arrived. One of the speakers kept emphasizing that if you didn't know the moment you were saved, you weren't really saved. That didn't feel quite right to me since I couldn't tell you the moment I was saved, but I knew that I was Christian – a born again (and from above) follower of Jesus.

Growing up in a good, evangelical church, I heard the gospel many times. When you do that at age nine, you may not experience a dramatic life change, or a deep enough understanding of all salvation entails, to sense the drama of moving from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light.

During those early years, I found myself continually asking Jesus to be my Savior. I can't tell you which one of those time was *the* time – *the* moment I was born again – but I do know that one of those times I was. And I know that in my later teen years I began to grow in my relationship with Jesus and bear fruit, which contributed to the assurance of salvation that came over me.

What's more important than remembering *the moment* you were born again, is that you know you that *you are indeed* born again – that you have experienced forgiveness of your sin through your faith in Christ – and that you *are* trusting Jesus and that you have an *ongoing* and *growing* relationship with Jesus.

Then Luke summarizes Paul's ministry among other Jews in Ephesus – those he ministered to in the synagogue:

Read v.8

* 8 **And he entered the synagogue and continued speaking out boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading *them* about the kingdom of God.**

Paul did what he always did: he spoke out **boldly, reasoning and persuading *them* about the kingdom of God**, and, no doubt, King Jesus.

Remember the response he received from Jews in the synagogue during his brief, earlier stopover? According to Acts 18:20, **they asked him to stay for a longer time.**

Previously they wanted to hear more from Paul, but **three months** was enough (actually longer than most others could tolerate him):

Read v.9a

***⁹ But when some were becoming hardened and disobedient, speaking evil of the Way before the people, he withdrew from them...**

Just as the son hardens some things, and melts others, so the truth Paul proclaimed hardened some hearts, but melted others. Like Pharaoh (and at times, the children Israel) in the days of Moses, some in the synagogue became **hardened and disobedient** toward God's truth. Instead of welcoming the good news about Jesus, they began **speaking evil of the Way** (a great name for those who proclaim *the way* of salvation in Jesus, who identified Himself in John 14:6 as "the way, the truth, and the life.") **before the people.**

But the good news is that not everyone was hardened. Some hearts were melted and became followers of Jesus. So we read that when Paul withdrew, he did not go alone:

Read v.9b

***⁹ ...and took away the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus.**

Those who became followers of Jesus, followed Paul to a new place of learning. It seems Paul rented space from **Tyrannus** (*tyrant* or *absolute ruler* – a nickname given by students...or his real name by mean parents? 😊) He may have been the teacher *at* or owner *of* a lecture hall that housed a school.

Some manuscripts say that Paul taught daily from the 5th to the 10 hour (11 AM to 4 PM), which was normally siesta time, when folks would rest. It may be accurate information, but not in the original text of Acts. At that time of day, Paul may've been able to rent the hall more cheaply. He may have paid for it from working daily at his trade of tent making (20:34), and perhaps from gifts from Priscilla and Aquila.

In any case, it provided him a venue for training disciples, at a time when more people would be off work. And unlike a synagogue, it was a neutral site that would be more appealing to Gentiles.

Read v.10

***¹⁰ This took place for two years, so that all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.**

For **two years** Paul labored – as a tentmaker *and* as an evangelist, pastor, and disciple maker. And even though many rejected God's truth,

Luke is able to write: **that all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.**

Luke's not suggesting *every* single person in Asia heard the gospel, but that the gospel spread throughout all of Asia as a result of Paul's ministry there.

What a contrast to what happened on Paul's previous missionary journey. Remember what we read during that trip?

Read 16:6

***⁶ They passed through the Phrygian and Galatian region, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia;**

Earlier the door to Asia had been closed; now it's wide open. Sometimes, timing is everything. The time was right for the door to open – and God sent Paul through it – and others followed.

It was through Paul faithfulness in Ephesus that the church in Colossae came into existence, not to mention others as well, perhaps even the seven churches addressed in Revelation.

As Luke pointed out in verse 10:

Read v.10b

***¹⁰ ...so that all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.**

Why can't God do in South County, what He did in Ephesus...and beyond? Isn't the gospel just as true today as it was then? And isn't the Holy Spirit just as powerful today as He was then? The best way for us to find out if God is able to do the same thing *here and now*, is to labor to be as faithful as Paul was – as faithful as Pricilla and Aquila were – as faithful as the other believers in Ephesus were. Maybe God wants to *do here and now*, what He did *there and then*.