

Armagh

A Beautiful Blossom in the Orchard County

One of the most beautiful sights I have ever seen is County Armagh in full bloom. I had the wonderful experience of travelling through the Orchard County at a time when the apple trees were in full blossom. I saw so many acres of blossom - laden orchards that it has left a lasting impression upon my mind concerning the beauty of Creation.

I have fond memories of making many journeys along the winding road from Loughgall to Armagh city. In this historic city there is so much for the visitor to take in. One cannot but admire its architectural beauty. A number of the public buildings and Georgian townhouses were built by Francis Johnston, a native of Armagh, who was Ireland's greatest architect of that period. These buildings stand today as a testimony to his craftsmanship.

The Cathedral Library, the Observatory and the County Museum are amongst the city's many wonderful attractions. The Planetarium, with its spectacular Star Shows, continues to attract visitors not only from all over Ireland, but from many parts of the world. In scientific circles the Planetarium has earned a world-wide reputation.

However, Armagh is probably best known for its Ecclesiastical history. It seems remarkable to the visitor that both Cathedrals in the city are dedicated to Saint Patrick.

But when one considers the Saint's association with Armagh it is easy to understand why the local people want to identify with him. Patrick called Armagh 'my sweet hill', and built a stone church on the hill upon which the Church of Ireland Cathedral now stands.

The Book of Armagh contains the oldest manuscript of one of Saint Patrick's writings, called his Confession, or Testimony. This manuscript was written by the famous scribe, Ferndomnagh, in the year 807 A.D. In fact, it is from Saint Patrick's own writings alone that we can get an accurate account of his association with Ireland.

Patrick tells us in his Confession that he first came to this country as a slave and that he spent six years in captivity, tending sheep. Concerning his spiritual condition when he arrived in Ireland, he writes, "*I did not know the true God, but lay in death and unbelief, and took no thought for my salvation.*"

Not only was Patrick a slave in the physical sense, but he was also in the bondage of spiritual darkness at that time. But God, in His mercy, reached down to this young man and freed him from the shackles of sin. Patrick tells us, "*And there, (in Ireland) the Lord opened the sense of my unbelief that I might at last remember my sins and be converted with all my heart to the Lord my God.*"

Patrick eventually escaped from captivity, having travelled 200 miles to get to a ship which would take him back to his own country. But it was the Lord's will that he should return to Ireland, this time not as a slave of men, but as a servant of God. The Saint writes, "*And there, (back at home) I saw in the night the vision of a man, whose name was Victoricus, coming as it were from Ireland, with countless letters. And he gave me one of them, and I read the opening words of the letter, which were, 'THE VOICE OF THE IRISH'. I thought that at the same moment I heard their voice, saying, 'We ask thee, boy, come and walk among us once more.'*"

Patrick did return to Ireland, and stayed here for the remainder of his life. He writes, “*Christ the Lord, who bade me come here, (to the Irish) and stay with them for the rest of my life...I am prepared to give even my life without hesitation and most gladly for His Name, and it is there (in Ireland) that I wish to spend it until I die, if the Lord would grant it to me.*”

Patrick loved the people, and for some thirty years he made every effort to explain to them the way of salvation. He proclaimed to the inhabitants of this little island the message of the Scriptures, showing them:

➤ **They were sinners**

‘For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God’s glorious standard.’¹

➤ **The penalty for sin**

“But cowards, unbelievers, the corrupt, murderers, the immoral, those who practice witchcraft, idol worshipers, and all liars—their fate is in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.”²

➤ **They could not earn or merit salvation by their own efforts**

‘God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can’t take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it’.³

➤ **God has provided a way of salvation**

“For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.”⁴

➤ **Their need to repent**

“And you will perish, too, unless you repent of your sins and turn to God.”⁵

➤ **Their need to put their faith in Jesus Christ for salvation**

Therefore, since we have been made right in God’s sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us.⁶ There is salvation in no one else! God has given no other name under heaven by which we must be saved’.⁷

Saint Patrick told the Irish people of how the Lord Jesus Christ had died upon the cross as a substitute for sinners, thus paying in full the penalty for the guilt of their sin. He urged them to repent of their sins and to put their faith in Jesus, trusting Him alone as Saviour. He exhorted them to believe that as a result of Christ’s work on their behalf at Calvary, their sins would be forgiven and they would be saved. Patrick proved from the Scriptures the certainty and assurance of salvation through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Many of our ancestors responded to his message and were converted.

This message is as relevant today as it was when Saint Patrick preached it in Armagh and throughout this little island many centuries ago.

But what about you, dear Friend? Perhaps your life is similar to what Saint Patrick’s was when he first set foot in Ireland? He said, “I did not know the true God...I was in unbelief...I took no thought for my salvation.” Maybe this is your condition today? But God, who saved Patrick’s soul and transformed his life, is willing to meet you at the very point of your need.

Jesus said, “Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal together as friends.”⁸

Could it be that the Saviour is knocking on your heart right now?
How will you respond to His knock? Will you invite Him in?
Will you ask Him to forgive you and trust Him to save you?

‘Seek the LORD while you can find him. Call on him now while he is near’.⁹

‘For God says, “At just the right time, I heard you.
On the day of salvation, I helped you
Indeed, the “right time” is now. Today is the day of salvation’.¹⁰

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Scripture References

- 1: Romans Ch.3 v. 23
- 2: Revelation Ch.21 v. 8
- 3: Ephesians Ch.2 vs. 8, 9
- 4: John Ch.3 v. 16
- 5: Luke Ch.13 v. 3
- 6: Romans Ch.5 v. 1
- 7: Acts Ch.4 v. 12
- 8: Revelation Ch.3 v. 20
- 9: Isaiah Ch.55 v. 6
- 10: 2 Corinthians Ch. 6 v. 2

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