

## **SAINT PATRICK**

### ***From Prisoner to Preacher***

#### ***Patrick's Arrival in Ireland***

When Patrick stepped off the boat and set foot on Irish soil for the first time, he arrived as a prisoner. The prisoner would soon become a slave. What a traumatic experience for this teenager who, just a short while previously had enjoyed a relatively carefree lifestyle. He was born in Britain in approximately AD 390, during the days of the Roman occupation. His grandfather was a Priest in the Christian church and his father, Calpurnius, a Deacon. Patrick's father was also an official employed by the Roman administration and he owned an estate. One day, a band of Irish raiders attacked the estate, killing some of the servants. The rest of the servants, along with Patrick, were captured and taken to the boats. As the boats crossed the sea on their way to Ireland, Patrick, now a prisoner must have wondered if he would ever see his home or family again. Would he ever be reunited with his loving parents? What would become of him now? So many questions must have been on his mind as the boat docked and he stepped ashore to face an uncertain future.

His captors were Irish pirates who made their living by supplying the lucrative slave trade with men, women and children they had forcibly taken from their homes. They made no hesitation in conveying Patrick and his fellow prisoners to the slave market. There in that place of wickedness and depravity these unfortunates were put on public display. They were considered to be mere pieces of merchandise by those who inspected them. They were offered for sale as slaves to the highest bidder. Many potential purchasers regarded slaves as being of no more value than horses or cattle.

#### ***Patrick's Slavery***

Patrick was purchased by a farmer who led him away to what would be his new home. Unfortunately, his new master did not treat him very well. Patrick was put to work tending sheep out on the hillsides, where he endured a lot of hardship. In his writings, he records the fact that he suffered hunger and nakedness and recalls being near to the point of death. For the next six years he experienced the cruelty of man's inhumanity to man in the form of physical slavery.

However, Patrick's slavery was not just of the physical type. He was a slave long before he set foot in Ireland. He was a slave long before he tended sheep on an Irish mountain. The chain of slavery which held him captive was the sinful nature he inherited. The Scriptures make it clear that all of Adam's descendants inherited a sinful nature. The apostle Paul writes, **'When Adam sinned, sin entered the world. Adam's sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned.'**<sup>1</sup> **No one is righteous – not even one.'**<sup>2</sup>

Patrick, in his writings does not say very much about his physical slavery. However, he talks in great detail about the spiritual slavery which held him captive. He says, *"I did not then believe in the Living God, nor had I believed, since my infancy, but I remained in death and unbelief...I took no thought for my salvation."* Since his childhood he had been exposed to the teachings of the Scriptures. However, being reared in a Christian home and brought up on the teachings of the Word of God does not make a person a Christian.

#### ***Patrick's Awakening***

At that time Patrick was an alien in a foreign country, having no legal rights or privileges. He was without family or friends to comfort or help him. As he tended the sheep out on the windswept hills, the young shepherd would surely have despaired had not God intervened. The Lord began to deal with him and to make him aware of the seriousness of his spiritual condition as outlined in the Scriptures he had once rejected. The Holy Spirit confronted Patrick with the following facts:

- **He was a sinner:** 'For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard'.<sup>3</sup>
- **As a sinner, he was subject to sin's penalty:** 'The wages [penalty] of sin is death'.<sup>4</sup>

Unless this penalty for sin was paid in full he would be cast into 'the unquenchable fires of hell'.<sup>5</sup> Good works, charitable deeds, sincerity or religious rituals would not be accepted as payment of this penalty. So how could this young man, a sinner by nature, be released from sin's terrible penalty? The Holy Spirit revealed to him the good news that God would accept payment of this penalty by someone who was willing to pay it on the sinner's behalf. Jesus Christ, who is sinless, was willing to become the sinner's substitute and pay in full the penalty for sin. Referring to Jesus, the prophet Isaiah writes, 'He was pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sins. He was beaten so we could be whole. He was whipped so we could be healed. All of us, like sheep, have strayed away. We have left God's paths to follow our own. Yet the Lord laid on him the sins of us all'.<sup>6</sup>

Through His death on the cross Jesus secured a pardon and freedom from sin's penalty and power for all who will repent of their sins and put their faith in Him. 'God paid a ransom to save you...It was the precious blood of Christ, the sinless, spotless Lamb of God.'<sup>7</sup> He purchased our freedom with the blood of his Son and forgave our sins'.<sup>8</sup>

### Patrick's Conversion

Out on a wild Irish hillside Patrick had a life-changing experience, which he describes in his writings as follows: "*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.*" The Lord, by His grace, broke the chains of spiritual slavery which had held Patrick in bondage. Though still a slave in the physical sense, he now experienced the spiritual freedom which comes when a sinner repents and puts his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

### From Prisoner to Preacher

Patrick spent six years in Ireland as a slave until finally he was able to escape and make his way home. As far as he was concerned he would never set foot in Ireland again. But God had other plans for this man and after a number of years brought him back to Ireland. When Patrick returned to the land of his captivity he came, not as a prisoner but as a preacher. For the remainder of his life Patrick faithfully proclaimed the Gospel to the Irish people. He preached from the Scriptures the message of Christ's liberating power that can release those who are bound in chains of spiritual darkness and enslaved by sin. According to Patrick, thousands of Irish people were freed from spiritual slavery when they repented of their sins, acknowledged that Christ had died as their substitute and by faith received Him as Saviour.

### A Personal Encounter

Patrick was all alone when he repented, confessed his sins to God and was converted. He did not have a religious minister with him. He was not in a church building at the time. He did not have a Bible or prayer book. He was not depending on sacraments, saints, pilgrimages or penance. Today many people believe they need some or all of these in order to be saved. However,

- There is not a religious leader on the face of the earth who can save a person's soul. Jesus said, 'I am the way, the truth and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me'.<sup>9</sup> Speaking of Jesus, Saint Peter said, 'There is salvation in no one else! God has given no other name under heaven by which we must be saved'.<sup>10</sup>
- There is not a church or religious organisation on earth that can save a person from sin's penalty. Eternal life is in Christ. 'And this is what God has testified; He has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son'.<sup>11</sup>

- There is not a saint or angel in heaven who can assist or speak on behalf of sinners. 'There is one God and one Mediator who can reconcile God and humanity - the man Christ Jesus'.<sup>12</sup>

Christ alone can free sinners from the bondage of spiritual slavery and save them from a lost eternity. Jesus said, "If the Son sets you free, you are truly free."<sup>13</sup>

### STEPS TO FAITH IN JESUS

Jesus purchased for us a pardon by paying the penalty for our sins when He died on the cross as our substitute and sin-bearer. This pardon will be put to your account when you:

**ACKNOWLEDGE** the fact that you are a sinner and that you cannot earn or merit salvation.

**BELIEVE** that when Jesus died on the cross He paid, on your behalf, the penalty for your sins.

**COME** to the risen Saviour in sincere repentance, confessing your need of His forgiveness.

**DECIDE** to reach out by faith and receive from God the gift of eternal life.

Today you can have a personal encounter with God. He can do for you what He did for Patrick:

*"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."*

'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved'.<sup>14</sup>

'Today is the day of salvation'.<sup>15</sup>

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### Scripture References

1: Romans Ch.5 v.12

2: Romans Ch.3 v.10

3: Romans Ch.3 v.23

4: Romans Ch.6 v.23

5: Mark Ch.9 v.43

6: Isaiah Ch.53 vs.5,6

7: 1 Peter Ch.1 vs.18,19

8: Ephesians Ch.1 v.7

9: John Ch.14 v.6

10: Acts Ch.4 v.12

11: 1 John Ch.5 v.11

12: 1 Timothy Ch.2 v.5

13: John Ch.8 v.36

14: Romans Ch.10 v.13

15: 2 Corinthians Ch.6 v.2



