

## SAINT PATRICK

### PATRON SAINT OF IRELAND

#### CONFESSION:

##### Five Amazing Words:

*"I am Patrick, a sinner."*

Many people are utterly amazed when they read these five words which are recorded in Patrick's Confession, his own personal testimony, his written account of his life and ministry. People wonder how a man who so clearly describes himself as a sinner could later be recognised as the Patron Saint of Ireland. Perhaps it is Patrick's honesty that distinguishes him from others who exalted themselves, or were exalted by others to the position of Sainthood.

#### SAINT PATRICK'S NAME

Saint Patrick's name has been associated with a number of places of historical and ecclesiastical interest in Ireland, including Croagh Patrick in County Mayo, Slemish Mountain in County Antrim, Downpatrick in County Down, and the Cathedrals in Counties Armagh and Dublin. However, Patrick was not an Irishman. He was born in Britain, in approximately AD 390, during the days of the Roman occupation. His grandfather was a priest. Calpurnius, Patrick's father was a deacon in the Christian Church.

#### SAINT PATRICK'S CHILDHOOD

If Patrick was baptised as an infant, then it is evident that neither the ritual nor the waters of baptism could change the sinful nature he, like all of Adam's descendants had inherited. The Word of God makes it clear that, *'When Adam sinned, sin entered the world. Adam's sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned'*.<sup>1</sup> Neither the words of a religious minister or the sprinkling of water could transform a sinner into a child of God.

Patrick had the privilege of being reared in a home in which there was a strong Christian influence. From childhood he would have been instructed in spiritual matters and was familiar with the Gospel. Unfortunately, he turned his back upon God and rebelled against what he had been taught. Patrick knew, from the teaching he had received from the Scriptures that, *'cowards, unbelievers, the corrupt, murderers, the immoral, those who practice witchcraft, idol worshippers, and all liars – their fate is in the fiery lake of burning sulphur'*.<sup>2</sup> Yet, he could still say, *"I took no thought for my salvation."*

#### CAPTIVITY

When Patrick was sixteen years old he was taken prisoner by raiders who attacked his father's estate. His captors brought him to Ireland where they sold him as a slave. The sheep farmer for whom he laboured did not treat him very well and Patrick, in his own words, speaks of hunger, nakedness and being near to the point of death. His physical circumstances left a lot to be desired but his spiritual condition was far more serious. He had wandered away from God. In his writings he says, *"I did not know the true God...but lay in death and unbelief."* However, things were about to change! The Holy Spirit began to deal with him and to make him aware of the seriousness of his spiritual condition. He 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: *'For the wages [penalty] of sin is death'*.<sup>4</sup>
- ▶ Religious exercises or good works could not earn him exemption from payment of this penalty.

The Holy Spirit left Patrick in no doubt concerning the fact that unless the penalty for sin was paid he, like all who die in their sins, would be *'thrown into hell...where the maggots never die and the fire never goes out'*.<sup>5</sup>

This young man would surely have despaired had not the Holy Spirit also revealed to him the fact that God would accept payment of this penalty by Jesus, who was willing to pay it on the sinner's behalf. Jesus, who was sinless, was willing to become the sinner's substitute, to take the sinner's place and to pay in full, on his behalf, the penalty for sin.

## CONVERSION

The prophet Isaiah tells us that Jesus *'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> The Scriptures make it clear that God paid a ransom price to save us from the penalty for sin: *'It was the precious blood of Christ, the sinless, spotless Lamb of God'*.<sup>7</sup> *He is so rich in kindness and grace that he purchased our freedom with the blood of his Son and forgave our sins'*.<sup>8</sup>

Jesus Christ shed His blood on behalf of every sinner who will repent and receive Him as Saviour. *'He saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins, giving us a new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit'*.<sup>9</sup> *Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it'*.<sup>10</sup> Faith in Jesus Christ and His work of Atonement on our behalf is necessary for Salvation.

Patrick had a life-changing experience on a wild Irish mountainside. He tells us in his writings: *"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."* After six years of slavery in Ireland Patrick escaped and returned home. However, God brought him back to Ireland some years later. No longer a slave, Patrick set out to proclaim to the inhabitants of this little island the good news of Christ's liberating power. He spent the remainder of his life preaching, teaching, and pointing people to Jesus, the Lamb of God who died on the cross at Calvary and rose from the dead to secure salvation for all who will repent of their sins and put their faith in Him. Patrick, in his writings, records the fact that thousands of Irish people were converted. When his work on earth was completed, Patrick's soul entered immediately into the presence of the Lord. His body was laid to rest in Ireland, the land in which he had laboured faithfully as he sought to rescue people from paganism, superstition, idolatry and unbelief.

## WHEN DID PATRICK BECOME A SAINT?

Hundreds of years after Patrick's death he was given the title, 'Patron Saint of Ireland'. However, according to the Scriptures, Patrick became a saint the moment he was converted. As this young man tended sheep on a hillside in Ireland, God had imparted spiritual life to him. The Scriptures describe this new birth in various ways:

- Reborn: *'Not with a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan, but a birth that comes from God'*.<sup>11</sup>
- Born of the Holy Spirit: *'Humans can reproduce only human life, but the Holy Spirit gives birth to spiritual life'*.<sup>12</sup>
- Born again: Jesus said, *'I tell you the truth, unless you are born again, you cannot see the kingdom of God'*.<sup>13</sup>
- New life through the Holy Spirit: *'He saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins, giving us a new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit'*.<sup>14</sup>

Patrick became a saint, not because of anything he himself had done, but because of what Christ had done on his behalf. Patrick, a sinner by nature, became a saint when he repented of his sins and put his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

## WHAT IS A SAINT?

The apostle Paul, writing to some of Christ's followers who lived in different areas, addressed them as saints: *'Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints which are in all Achaia.<sup>15</sup> To the saints which are at Ephesus.<sup>16</sup> To all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi'.<sup>17</sup>*

According to the Scriptures saints are people who have the following attributes:

- ▶ They have been born again (regenerated).
- ▶ They have repented of their sins and have been forgiven.
- ▶ They have had their sins put to Christ's account.
- ▶ They have had the merits of Christ's sinless life and substitutionary death put to their account.
- ▶ They have been redeemed, justified, pardoned and saved from sin's penalty by Jesus Christ, who came *'to seek and save those who are lost'.<sup>18</sup>*
- ▶ They have been reconciled to God by the death of His Son.
- ▶ They have become a child of God through faith in Jesus Christ.
- ▶ They have been accepted by God, not because of anything they have done, but only because of what Jesus Christ has done on their behalf when He became their substitute and bore the punishment for their sins.

## PATRICK, PATRON SAINT

A saint is therefore a sinner who has been converted. Conversion must take place while a person is alive. Though Ecclesiastical authorities may issue decrees declaring the beatification or canonisation of people after their death, the Scriptures make it clear that people become saints while they are alive. Sinners become saints the moment they repent of their sins and put their faith in Jesus Christ. A person cannot be converted after they have died. The saints who are presently in heaven were saints before they died. The saints who are alive on earth will one day join their fellow-saints in heaven. There they will meet Patrick, who became a saint while living in Ireland.

## OFFER OF A PARDON

Dear Friend, God can do for you what He did for Patrick. You, like Patrick, can be converted. Today, if you repent of your sins and put your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, you will receive the gift of eternal life, the assurance of sins forgiven and the guarantee of a home in Heaven, where you will one day meet Ireland's Patron Saint. The Lord invites you to come to Him without delay. *'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'.<sup>19</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.

The following is a suggested prayer:

*‘Lord, I know I am not worthy of your mercy, but I believe you will not turn me away, for I come to you in sincere repentance, asking you to forgive my sins and to grant me the gift of eternal life. Thank you, Lord, for hearing and answering my prayer.’*

### STEPPING STONES

If you have trusted Christ as your Saviour you are now a member of God’s family and can call Him Father. In order to grow spiritually it is important that you:

**LISTEN** to your Heavenly Father. God will speak to you through His Word, so Bible reading is very important.

**LEARN** to spend time with your Heavenly Father each day. You can speak to God in prayer.

**LOOK** to Him always for direction for your life. God’s Holy Spirit, who indwells you, will guide and instruct you as you read the Bible and pray.

### Scripture References

1: Romans Ch.5 v.12	2: Revelation Ch.21 v. 8	3: Romans Ch.3 v. 23
4: Romans Ch.6 v. 23	5: Mark Ch.9 vs. 47, 48	6: Isaiah Ch.53 vs. 5, 6
7: 1 Peter Ch.1 v. 19	8: Ephesians Ch.1 v. 7	9: Titus Ch.3 v. 5
10: Ephesians Ch.2 v. 9	11: John Ch.1 v. 13	12: John Ch.3 v. 6
13: John Ch.3 v. 3	14: Titus Ch.3 v. 5	15: Luke Ch.19 v. 10
16: 2 Corinthians Ch.6 v. 2		