

Who was Saint Patrick?



Patrick was born to a Christian family in Britain around AD 375. His father was a deacon, and his grandfather was a pastor. (This was early, basic Christianity before the medieval church added the requirement of celibacy). Britain was a thriving Roman colony and Christianity had already migrated to the far reaches of the Roman Empire.

By the end of the fourth century, the Roman Empire was falling upon hard times. The invasion of the Huns and Goths in other Roman provinces forced the Roman legions to abandon the British Isles. The last Roman legion left Britain in AD 400, and then came roving militias, gangs, and pirates.

Patrick's father was a civic leader and a wealthy businessman. The family lived in a seaside villa where the coastline was particularly vulnerable to piracy. When Patrick was sixteen, the attack came. While he was tending his father's flocks, the pirates charged up the slopes from the sea. His parents and siblings escaped, but he was captured along with

many of his father's servants. Bound in the hull of a pirate ship, Patrick was taken to Ireland and sold as a slave to a Druid tribal chieftain. The life that he had dreamed for himself was shattered. He had no friends, no chance for education, and no possessions. He lived in filthy squalor herding swine.

It was then that the message of Jesus Christ, which he had learned from his father, began to have meaning. As is often the case, it is not until we are drained of all our pride and resources that we begin to think about God. While we have our friends and creature comforts, we are often distracted from reflecting on the meaning of life and the condition of our soul. Who knows whether Patrick would ever have come to appreciate Jesus Christ if he had remained wealthy in his father's home? In Jesus' story of the prodigal son, the rebellious young man came to his senses after he became destitute.

And he would have gladly filled his stomach with the pods that the swine were eating, and no one was giving anything to him. But when he came to his senses, he said, "How many of my father's hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight.'" (Luke 15:16-18)

Patrick wrote in his confessions, *"I was sixteen and knew not the true God; but in a strange land the Lord opened my unbelieving eyes, and I was converted."*

Conversion to Jesus Christ is an inexplicable, supernatural event whereby one finally sees his sin, repents, and receives Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. The Bible teaches that it is at this point that one is born again. The Holy Spirit enters the life and regenerates the soul. Read the following Scriptures about conversion to learn what Patrick experienced and what you also can experience.

Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." (John 3:3)

Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. (2 Corinthians 5:17)

He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, (Titus 3:5)

And you were dead in your trespasses and sins ...But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved). (Ephesians 2:1, 4-5)

As a new Christian, Patrick began to grow spiritually. He eventually came to the place where he thanked God for his enslavement, knowing that God had a good purpose for his sufferings. Patrick wrote,

Anything that happens to me, whether pleasant or distasteful, I ought to accept it with calmness giving thanks to God.

Love and reverence for God came to me more and more, building up my faith so much that daily I would pray a hundred times or more. Even while working in the woods or on the mountain, I woke up to pray before dawn...it was the fervent Spirit praying within me.

After six years of enslavement, he awoke one night and felt led of God to sneak away to the shore. There he found a ship which returned him to his hometown in Britain. He was joyfully reunited with his family and continued his studies and family work. At first, returning to Ireland was the furthest thing from his mind, but God impressed upon him the need to return to Ireland as a missionary. Patrick wrote,

I did not go back to Ireland of my own accord. It is not in my own nature to show divine mercy toward the very ones who once enslaved me.

Patrick's family and friends tried to dissuade him from returning. The dangers were great; the Irish

were considered barbaric and not worth saving; pagan Druid priests were known to roast Christians alive. In AD 432 Patrick sold his inheritance and embarked on his missionary outreach to Ireland. Landing at each coastal town, Patrick preached the Gospel, often to a hostile audience who threatened his life. Converts were few at first, but soon the Lord brought spiritual revival to Ireland. Thousands repented of their ungodliness, and the Irish church was born. Patrick also codified Irish law, taught reading and writing, and fought for many social reforms. Patrick wrote,

Once the Irish worshipped idols and unclean things, having no knowledge of the True God; but now they are among God's own people.

I was an illiterate slave, as ignorant as one who neglects to provide for his future. And I am certain of this: that although I was as a dumb stone lying squashed in the mud, the Mighty and Merciful God came, dug me out and set me on top of the wall. Therefore, I praise Him and ought to render Him something for His wonderful benefits to me both now and in eternity.

As God converted and used Patrick, God can convert and use each one of us. God has a good purpose for your life if you will turn your life over to Him. In his confession, Patrick invited his readers to also serve God.

I wish that you also would exert greater effort and begin more powerful acts for God.

Spiritual Lessons from Patrick's Life:

* **God can cause good to come from evil.** The pirates intended evil against Patrick, but God turned it around to save an entire nation. God can do the same through what you believe are your misfortunes.

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.
(Romans 8:28)

* **Never underestimate the impact Christian truth has upon a culture, a nation, or a family.** Despite all of the evils here in America, we have many blessings because our founders built this nation upon Christian values. This gave our nation the right motives and the moral framework for success. Secular humanism attributes our national greatness to democratic freedom. However, without a Christian foundation, freedom actually produces more corruption, not less. The reason for our greatness is the Bible.

Many other nations in the world suffer greatly because they have not received the Gospel, and, therefore, do not operate on a Christian worldview. Regrettably, Christianity is eroding in America. When it is finally gone, our people will return to primitive barbarism, superstition, and tyranny. All of the evils of slavery, superstition, gross immorality, and violence will return to our land. Like Patrick, let's work to return our nation to Christian values.

Let us be thankful for the Christian truths we have been given, preserve them, and diligently pass them on to the next generation.

For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe.
(1 Thessalonians 2:13)

* **We can be grateful to those who brought us the truth.** Men like Patrick had the faith and took the risk to raise the spiritual standards of the nation. These are the trailblazers who make the way easier for subsequent followers. Who brought the Word of God to you? Do you value the arrival of the Word of God as a precious gift and privilege?

Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith.
(Hebrews 13:7)

* **Was Patrick a Saint?** The Biblical word "saint" means a "holy one," and the term was used in the Bible to describe any Christian on earth or in heaven. Patrick was ministering in the days of simple, Biblical Christianity before Christianity was fully accepted as the official religion of the Roman Empire. There was no pope, no celibate priesthood, no supremacy of the Roman church, no sacramental system. The ministry of Saint Patrick resembled simple Protestantism.

* **Saint Patrick's Day is certainly not about a drinking party,** even as Christmas is not about Santa Claus and Easter about a bunny. It is very telling how unbelievers misuse and abuse sacred holidays, but this is the nature of fallen man. The unconverted are unable to appreciate the things of the Spirit of God. They only know how to celebrate Irishness, the shamrock, the color green. They miss celebrating the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The best way you can celebrate Saint Patrick's Day is to receive the very message of Jesus Christ that Patrick preached. Then you will not only be celebrating Saint Patrick's Day, but you will be celebrating your eternal salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ.

That if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.
(Romans 10:9-10)

B.E. Winship

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