# Patrick Missionary to Ireland Psalm 50:15

PROVIDENCE REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH



Call upon Me in the day of distress; I shall rescue you, and you will glorify Me."—Psalm 50:15

This verse played an important role in Patrick's life. On this St Patrick's Day 2024, let us take a moment to reiterate the truth about who Patrick was and what he believed and preached. He was used mightily of God to convert many to Christ in Ireland. His work was seen as such a threat to the both the pagans, and later the Pope in Rome, that the enemies of the gospel took up arms to conquer and subject those who for hundreds of years had believed the gospel as the fruit of the preaching and teaching of Patrick.



Patrick was born in 385 near the modern town of Dumbarton, Scotland. At the time of his birth this was in Roman Britania. Being born only 300 years after the time of Christ, of course there was no such thing as the Roman Catholic Church as we know it. Although they claim Patrick as a "saint" this has been shown to be propaganda in order to hide the true ministry and preaching of Patrick from the masses (no pun intended).

The myths that have been spun about Patrick are mostly all just that, myths, made up stories and legends. These myths also serve to obscure the truth about his powerful testimony of salvation and his work planting over 300 churches in Ireland.



In his *Confessio*, or confession, written as a testimony to the greatness of God and His grace, Patrick introduces himself and identifies his family, but then skips over the first 16 years of his life to recall the amazing account of his kidnapping by Irish pirates. These pirates captured Patrick along with about 200 others and took them back to Ireland as slaves. He was tasked with farm work and shepherding.

During the 6<sup>th</sup> year of his enslavement, he recalls a vivid dream in which he saw a way to escape, and being wakened from the dream he managed to get away and travel over 200 miles to the nearest port, where a ship headed for Britain was about to set sail.



Although he had been raised by Christian parents, their faith had not been his up to the point of his capture. Here is the introduction to his confession:

My name is Patrick. I am a sinner, a simple country person, and the least of all believers. I am looked down upon by many. My father was Calpornius. He was a deacon; his father was Potitus, a pastor, who lived at Bannavem Taburniae. His home was near there, and that is where I was taken prisoner. I was about sixteen at the time. At that time, I did not know the true God. I was taken into captivity in Ireland, along with thousands of others. We deserved this, because we had gone away from God, and did not keep his commandments. We would not listen to our pastors, who advised us about how we could be saved [Daniel 9:5-6]. The Lord brought his strong anger upon us, and scattered us among many nations even to the ends of the earth. It was among foreigners that it was seen how little I was.



#### He continues in his confession:

It was there that the Lord opened up my awareness of my lack of faith. Even though it came about late, I recognised my failings. So I turned with all my heart to the Lord my God [Joel 2:11], and he looked down on my lowliness [Luke 1:48] and had mercy on my youthful ignorance. He guarded me before I knew him, and before I came to wisdom and could distinguish between good and evil. He protected me and consoled me as a father does for his son. That is why I cannot be silent — nor would it be good to do so — about such great blessings and such a gift that the Lord so kindly bestowed in the land of my captivity. This is how we can repay such blessings, when our lives change and we come to know God, to praise and bear witness to his great wonders before every nation under heaven.



This is because there is no other God, nor will there ever be, nor was there ever, except God the Father. He is the one who was not begotten, the one without a beginning, the one from whom all beginnings come, the one who holds all things in being – this is our teaching. And his son, Jesus Christ, whom we testify has always been, since before the beginning of this age, with the father in a spiritual way. He was begotten in an indescribable way before every beginning. Everything we can see, and everything beyond our sight, was made through him. He became a human being; and, having overcome death, was welcomed to the heavens to the Father. The Father gave him all power over every being, both heavenly and earthly and beneath the earth. Let every tongue confess that Jesus Christ, in whom we believe and whom we await to come back to us in the near future, is Lord and God. He is judge of the living and of the dead; he rewards every person according to their deeds. He has generously poured on us the Holy Spirit, the gift and promise of immortality, who makes believers and those who listen to be children of God and co-heirs with Christ. This is the one we acknowledge and adore – one God in a trinity of the sacred name.



So I am first of all a simple country person, a refugee, and unlearned. I do not know how to provide for the future. But this I know for certain, that before I was brought low, I was like a stone lying deep in the mud. Then he who is powerful came and in his mercy pulled me out, and lifted me up and placed me on the very top of the wall. That is why I must shout aloud in return to the Lord for such great good deeds of his, here and now and forever, which the human mind cannot measure.

Upon his return and training as a minister of the gospel, Patrick was burdened to take the gospel back to those who had enslaved him. His goal was "to see pagan Ireland converted." He was opposed, threatened, and constantly in danger, but as he preached the gospel took root and people began to turn to Christ in repentance and faith.



Eventually even the King was converted and baptized by Patrick.

Stephen Nichols with Ligonier wrote about this, "A later legend would have it that Patrick rid all of Ireland of snakes. Snakes were not native to Ireland at the time. Instead, Patrick rid Ireland of marauding ways and a cultural and civil barbarianism by bringing not only Christianity to Ireland, but by bringing a whole new ethic. It was not too long ago that a New York Times' bestselling book argued that St. Patrick and his Ireland saved civilization."

Interestingly, although he is called the patron saint of Ireland, he has never been canonized by the Roman Church. They have just co-opted his story.



Patrick had arrived in Ireland on his gospel mission when he was bout 30 years old. It is believed that he died March 17, 461, near where the first church he had planted was located, in Saul.

In 432, Pope Celestine commissioned a man named Palladius to go to Ireland in order to bring the churches there under his control as the Bishop of Rome. He failed miserably. Historian Philip Schaff writes, "Palladius was so discouraged that he soon abandoned the field, with his assistants, for north Britain, where he died among the Picts... The Roman mission of Palladius failed; the independent mission of Patrick succeeded." (Philip Schaff, History of the Christian Church, Vol. 4, Ch. 2, Sect. 14, "The Conversion of Ireland")



As well as planting around 365 churches, Patrick baptized thousands of converts. In his approximate 60 years of ministry he appointed also appointed elders and established several "monasteries" (much like a modern day Bible college or seminary, not for monks) where there was training for pastors to serve these local churches. They started by being trained as evangelists.

The results are that Patrick was known as the "Apostle of Ireland" and Ireland itself gained the nickname "Isle of Saints and Scholars."



These churches in Ireland soon began sending missionaries to other places around the world. One notable missionary was Columba, send to Scotland in 563. In 612 another named Columbanus was sent to France and Germany. Kilian and several with him went as missionaries to Franconia and Wurzburg in 680. And Forannan and twelve brothers with him brought the Gospel to Belgium in 970.

History demonstrates over 600 years of missionary activity spreading from Ireland from the churches planted by Patrick.



In the ninth century, powerful Popes and their military forces set about subjecting Christian churches in Europe. They targeted Celtic churches especially as Pope Adrian IV issued to King Henry of England in 1155 a decree that authorized the invasion of Ireland and established the king as Lord of Ireland, calling upon the monarch to, "to extirpate the vices that have there taken root, [in Ireland] …saving to St. Peter and the holy Roman Church the annual pension of one penny from each house."

King Henry was able then to conquer the whole of Ireland in 1171-72.

The full text of the Papal Bull of Pope Adrian IV that empowered King Henry to conquer and subdue Christian churches to Rome can be read at: avalon.law.yale.edu/medieval/bullad.asp (as of 6.5.2021).



As often runs the pattern of history, a nation that is moved by winds of spiritually awakening sees the planting of churches, the spread of the gospel, and eventually the sending of missionaries. This follows the New Testament pattern. We then see resistance to the gospel and weakening of the churches' doctrine and practice as compromise, persecution, liberalism, and other —isms infect the people of God. Inevitably as the church in one nation begins to fail, we see is strengthened in others.

Patrick preached the true gospel of Jesus Christ to those in Ireland and this had effects around all of Europe for over 1000 years.



#### We read in Patrick's Confession:

So I'll never stop giving thanks to my God, who kept me faithful in the time of my temptation. I can today with confidence offer my soul to Christ my Lord as a living victim. He is the one who defended me in all my difficulties. I can say: Who am I, Lord, or what is my calling, that you have worked with me with such divine presence? This is how I come to praise and magnify your name among the nations all the time, wherever I am, not only in good times but in the difficult times too. Whatever comes about for me, good or bad, I ought to accept them equally and give thanks to God. He has shown me that I can put my faith in him without wavering and without end. However ignorant I am, he has heard me, so that in these late days I can dare to undertake such a holy and wonderful work. In this way I can imitate somewhat those whom the Lord foretold would announce his gospel in witness to all nations before the end of the world.



This is what we see has been fulfilled. Look at us: we are witnesses that the gospel has been preached right out to where there is nobody else there!

I am greatly in debt to God. He gave me such great grace, that through me, many people should be born again in God and brought to full life. Also that clerics should be ordained everywhere for this people who have lately come to believe, and who the Lord has taken from the ends of the earth.

Now I commend my soul to my most faithful God. For him I perform the work of an ambassador, despite my less than noble condition. However, God is not influenced by such personal situations, and he chose me for this task so that I would be one servant of his very least important servants.



In closing, consider this, again from Stephen Nichols with Ligonier:

"Should Christians celebrate St. Patrick's Day? If you do, you might want to consider wearing orange. Orange? Here's why. After 1798 the color of green was closely associated with Roman Catholicism and orange with Protestantism—after William of Orange, the Protestant king. The holiday is certainly not to be used as means for excessive partying and celebration. But wearing orange and trying to tell people who St. Patrick really was might be a good way to celebrate."



"So we remember Patrick best not in the legends and fables and not in the ways his holiday tends to be celebrated. Perhaps we remember him best by reflecting on the 'St. Patrick's Breastplate,' which has traditionally been attributed to him. The word breastplate is a translation of the Latin word *lorica*, a prayer, especially for protection.

"These prayers would be written out and at times placed on shields of soldiers and knights as they went out to battle. St. Patrick's Lorica points beyond himself and his adventurous life. It points to Christ, the one he proclaimed to the people who had taken him captive:



Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me, Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ on my right, Christ on my left, Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit down, Christ when I arise, Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me, Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me, Christ in every eye that sees me, Christ in every ear that hears me.



You can read the full confession of Patrick here:

https://www.confessio.ie/etexts/confessio\_english#01