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## PATRICK'S EXAMPLE ?

Should all Christians celebrate St. Patrick? He represents one of the great heroes of the Christian faith. Many consider him second only to the Apostle Paul in terms of courage, faith and accomplishment. His life and message brings great hope to those who live in troubled times. Patrick confronted a world of warfare, brutality, witchcraft, human sacrifice and sex slavery. And then he changed the world.

Patrick was born into an important family in a small Celtic village not far from today's Glasgow, Scotland, away in northern reaches of the Roman Empire at the end of the 4th century. His father was a magistrate and leader in the Christian church. His grandfather likewise was a church elder. Patrick spurned the church in his early years, considering himself a near-atheist. But his life changed dramatically when at age 16, he was captured with hundreds of others by marauding slave traders from Ireland.

In those days, when Ireland appeared on maps it often carried the notation "*here be monsters*." Druid lords of Ireland practiced a culture of death. They drank from skulls of their enemies, and decorated their gear with shrunken heads. One of their pagan rituals involved a giant wicker cage in the form of a man, which was stuffed with enemies, rivals, runaway slaves, even children. Then it was set on fire. In this dark barbaric world the abducted youth began a new life caring for sheep in the north of Ireland. Without adequate clothing and food, Patrick barely survived, little more than a sheep himself. But something thrived - his soul. He prayed, over a hundred times a day. God was merciful, and Patrick describes his radical conversion to sincere saving faith in the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Enduring numerous hardships, his fellow slaves called him "*holy boy*." Patrick writes that at age 22 he heard God's voice telling him "*your ship is ready*." Remarkably, he made his way to the coast and soon rejoined his family in Britain. In due time, Patrick writes, he heard Irish voices pleading, "*please, holy boy, come and walk among us again*." After much difficulty, and selling his noble title, Patrick and twelve friends sailed for Ireland in 435. He was determined to bring the freedom of the Gospel to the nearly stone-age people who had enslaved him years before, and who still resisted Christ.

Patrick's beautiful hymn says, "*I bind to myself today, the power of God to guide me, the shield of God to shelter me; Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me, Christ within me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me; Christ is salvation; with us ever be Thy salvation, O Lord !*" With only God's armor, Patrick and his companions brought Christ's light to a dark land. The good news of God's forgiveness in Christ turned the people to Him and away from pagan gods and rituals of death. In repentance and faith, they embraced the one true God who loved them enough to send His own Son to die for their sins.

Patrick writes, "*Before, I was humiliated, I was like a stone that lies in deep mud, but He who is mighty came and in His compassion, raised me up and placed me on top of the wall*." Patrick baptized more than 120,000 people and established 300 churches. Over his 30-year ministry, he and his followers set up schools and trained thousands of ministers. Their great work included preserving and copying the Bible and other important ancient documents. On the European continent, barbarians were burning books as they looted the fallen Roman Empire. Historical author Thomas Cahill notes, "*Without the mission of the Irish monks, who single-handedly re-founded European Civilization throughout the continent...the world that came after them would have been an entirely different one*."

Patrick introduced Ireland to the Bible and "The Book of the Law of Moses" which applied Scripture to every aspect of Irish society. Its transformation included ending slave and sex trafficking. The imprint of God's Word also traces through the Magna Carta, English Common Law, the Mayflower Compact, and the Declaration of Independence. Numerous nations have been transformed, without warfare, by the liberating truth of God's Word and faith in Christ. And the Gospel that transformed the Irish pagans from their beheading ways can do the same for anyone today who does not yet call Jesus Lord - including barbarians enslaved in a culture of death, suicide, genocide, sex slavery, beheading, and more.

World History Institute historian Marshall Foster notes that just as Christian civilization turned back the onslaught of marching Muslims intent on dominating Europe five centuries ago, we can do so today. It may involve defensive arms, but it will certainly require the prayer and missionary determination which fired Patrick. And as stated by Reformation theologian John Calvin, "*Until the church finds the will and heart to reach the Muslims with the Gospel we shall always be at peril*."