

Saint Patrick: A Soul Transformed

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“And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.”

~ Romans 12:2 ~

March is upon us which might beg the question, “Is it possible to write a credible 12:2 column in the context of 3/17?” Since my answer is “yes” to this mathematical question, I will now make my case.

Very few of us don't know that March 17th marks the celebration of Saint Patrick's Day, a festivity enjoyed worldwide. Saint Patrick is well known as the Patron Saint of Ireland. What follows is a short story about Patrick's life and why it so well replicates the admonition of Saint Paul in Romans 12:2, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” As Christians celebrate Saint Patrick's Day it would be well to remember that Patrick's response to Romans 12:2 changed the course of Irish history. Ireland not only converted wholesale from Pagan Druidism to Christianity, but it also began a Christian revival that lasted for almost 400 years. That revival impacted not only Ireland but the entirety of the British Isles and much of Western Europe.

Patrick was not Irish. Say what?! He was born into a well-to-do and traditionally Christian family in the western part of England in the early 5th century AD. He was lackadaisical about learning and about any serious Christian faith commitment. When he was 16 years old he was kidnapped by Irish marauders, transported to Ireland, and sold into slavery to a Druid high priest to serve as a shepherd where he spent the next six years of his life outdoors constantly experiencing the wonder of God's creation in many hours of silence and solitude.

According to one of only two of his writings that survive, his *Confession*, he learned to pray (1st Thessalonians 5:16-18), and through many hours of prayer, became a committed Christian while serving those long and arduous years as a shepherd. God spoke to Patrick through visions. Toward the end of his sixth year God told him in a dream (like Ananias in Acts 9:10 and Paul in Acts 16:9-10) to “head east”, that “his boat was ready” to return him to England. At great risk to himself he walked to the Eastern Irish Coast where, after he was first refused passage, boarded his ship and was transported to England. He found his way home and was reunited with his family where he was now a transformed and changed man. God was faithful.

While at home God spoke to him in another dream and made it clear that he was to return to Ireland to become a Christian missionary amid that Pagan culture. His family argued with him, begging him not to return. Roman church authorities did everything they could to dissuade him but when Patrick clearly heard God's call in that dream, he had no choice (Acts 5:29).

The remainder of Patrick's life should motivate every serious minded Christian. He clearly sought and discerned God's call (1st Samuel 3:8-10, Isaiah 6:8). He gave up the comfort of family and risked his life frequently confronting Druid leaders while serving among a foreign people and culture (Galatians 1:15-16). He was falsely accused by church authorities and had to respond. Thousands of the Irish were converted from paganism to Christianity (Matthew 28:18-20). Cultural artifacts for everyday use began to reflect the gospel message in their shape and form. Hymns were written, memorized, and sung to etch the gospel message into the minds of growing disciples.

By the end of his life, the Celtic Christian revival had begun. Little did Patrick know that his life's work began a movement in Ireland that lasted for hundreds of years. Monastic communities began first in Ireland then spread east to the British Isles and the mainland of Europe. Celtic monks were credited with founding small Christian monasteries and seminaries all over France and reaching further south and east to Italy, Austria, and beyond.

Application: While enjoying our corned beef and cabbage, might we Christians be seriously challenged as we celebrate Saint Patrick this year by forgetting the myths about snakes and shamrocks while focusing on what it means to seek God's call on our lives (Genesis 12:1-2, 2nd Peter 1:10), stepping up the building of our Christian character (Philippians 4:8), becoming more deeply committed disciples of Jesus Christ, and challenging our Christian brothers and sisters to do the same (John 12:26, Luke 9:23-26, Romans 12:1)? Let's prepare to do so.

So, how did we do with our math question? Does 3/17 mesh with 12:2? I think so. Saint Patrick was certainly a transformed man who influenced thousands and began a movement that lasted for centuries, all because God spoke to him challenging him to see Jesus all the more clearly. Might we be challenged this year to be further transformed as we celebrate Saint Patrick's Day by replicating Patrick and the Celts, becoming bolder sharing the good news of the Gospel with a very needy world?