



Title: Imitating Their Faith
Theme: Spiritual Lessons / Apostle Paul and St. Patrick
Series: St. Patrick's Sunday Messages

A saint has been defined as “a man in whom Christ lives”

The writer of the Book of Hebrews has some real sound advice for the children of God, “Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.” (Hebrews 13:7)

A saint has been defined as “a man in whom Christ lives.” The real leader of the church preaches and lives in Christ. Men are captivated by Christians who live out what they believe. Mankind will not necessarily agree with what a man preaches, but they will take note of how he lives.

The writer of Hebrews talks about the nature of all great leaders for the Lord in this dispensation. All Christian leaders have their part in the drama of life and then the curtain comes down. However, Christ is the same yesterday and today and will be forever. Just as Christ hates evil and calls out to sinners, He sends out those who will be obedient to do His work today.

One of the great leaders of New Testament is the Apostle Paul and he gives us this exhortation in 1 Corinthians 11:1, “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.” (1 Corinthians 11:1) Pray!

Just what is worth grasping as we look into the lives of men of faith?

Men are imitative beings, and from a law of their nature, those whom they most admire and whom they most associate with will have an effect on their character. This is why the Apostle Paul implores us to become imitators of him only as he follows Christ. Paul writes, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.” (Galatians 2:20)

Christians who desire to imitate Paul's faith in Christ will meditate on what the Bible says about him and appreciate the work God has done in men and women who have taken on the work of Christ since Paul's going home to be with the Lord. As we have just passed St. Patrick's day it would be good for us evaluate the outcome of the way of life of the Apostle Paul and St. Patrick.

I would like to read a prayer of St. Patrick titled "I Rise Today;" "I bind unto myself today the strong name of the trinity, by invocation of the same, the Three in One, the One in Three. I bind this day to me forever by power of faith in Christ's incarnation, His baptism in the Jordan river, His death on the cross for my salvation; His bursting from the spiced tomb, His riding up the heavenly way, His coming at the day of doom I bind unto myself today. I bind unto myself today the power of God to hold and lead, His eye to watch, His might to stay, His ear to harken to my need, the wisdom of my God to teach, His hand to guide, His shield to ward, the Word of God to give me speech, His heavenly host to be my guard. Christ be with me, Christ within me, Christ behind me, Christ before me, Christ beside me, Christ to win me; Christ to comfort and restore me; Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ in quiet, Christ in danger, Christ in hearts of all that love me, Christ in mouth of a friend..."

I bind unto myself the name, the strong name of the Trinity, by invocation of the same, the Three in One, and One in Three, of whom all nature hath creation, eternal Father, Spirit, Word; praise to the God of my salvation, salvation is of Christ the Lord!"

I would propose to you that Christians who walk in obedience to God's call upon their lives are worthy of our attention and we should imitate their faith. As I have taken time to prayerfully consider our message today. I was intrigued over the comparisons of the call of and the ministries given to the Apostle Paul and this man we call St. Patrick. Their lives show how to follow the call of God and the impact it can have upon the lives of those who hear the message of the Lord.

The first base to cover in imitating the faith of someone is to make sure that they have had a genuine conversion to Christ. In considering the outcome of the way of life of the Apostle Paul we should read of his heart before and after receiving Christ. Acts 26:9 records Paul's conversation with King Agrippa saying, "I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the Name of Jesus of Nazareth." Luke also writes about Paul's hope in Christ after his conversion, "The Jews all know the way I have lived ever since I was a child, from the beginning of my life in my own country, and also in Jerusalem. They have known me for a long time and can testify, if they are willing, that according to the strictest sect of our religion, I lived as a Pharisee. And now it is because of my hope in what God has promised our fathers that I am on trial today." (Acts 26:4-6)

The Apostle Paul knew what it was that kept him from being in the center of God's will, he repented, produced the fruit of repentance and confessed to those to whom he wanted to preach Christ. Paul told King Agrippa about his experience on the road to Damascus. (Acts 26:12-18) Listen to these words of Christ in Paul's confession. "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me? It is hard to kick against the goads." (Acts 26:14) Because of spiritual blindness, Paul, suffered a

short term physical blindness, however, his short term bondage opened the way for him to receive Christ as Savior and Lord.

Like Paul, St. Patrick had a season of bondage that opened his eyes to Christ. Listen to his confession, "I, Patrick, a sinner, a most simple countryman, the least of all the faithful and most contemptible to many, had for a father the deacon Calpurnius, son of the late Potitus, a priest... I was taken captive about sixteen years of age. I did not, indeed, know the true God; and I was taken into captivity in Ireland with many thousands of people according to our sins. We were quite drawn away from God. We did not keep His precepts, nor were we obedient to our priests who used to remind us of our salvation. The Lord brought down on us the fury of His being and scattered us among many nations, even to the ends of the earth, where I, in my smallness, am now to be found among foreigners. And there the Lord opened my mind to an awareness of my unbelief, in order that, even so late, I might remember my transgressions and turn with all my heart to the Lord my God, who had regard for my insignificance and pitied my youth and ignorance. And He watched over me before I knew Him, and before I learned sense or even distinguished between good and evil, and He protected me, and consoled me as a father would his son."

Both Paul and St. Patrick walked a season in unbelief in the Christ who showed his love for them upon the Cross, before they could express true love back to Him. God brought both Paul and St. Patrick to repentance through affliction and enabled them to enjoy conversion in Christ Name.

All non-Christians are in bondage of some kind due to non-belief and living for self. When a sinner has the courage to recognize the true condition of his spiritual heart, an enemy against God he may imitate the faith of Paul and St. Patrick.

This imitation of confessing and repentance to Christ leads to the joy and peace expressed by the Apostle Paul who wrote, "For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to Him through the death of His Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through His life! Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation." (Romans 5:10-11)

The first steps to cover in imitating a Christian's faith in Christ are to recognize one's true condition before the Lord, receive forgiveness found in Jesus and be reconciled unto God.

Life's focus is on the "Great Commission

The next step in imitating someone's faith in Christ is to make sure their life's focus is on the "Great Commission." Matthew 28:16-20 says, "Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'"

An examination of the Apostle Paul's and St. Patrick's lives, and a study of their God ordained ministries challenge all Christians to be open to the call of God on their lives. God used them powerfully and there is a heart attitude that must be grasped for the child of God who wants to enjoy the life changing ministry that they enjoyed. These two pillars of faith were committed to getting the gospel to those whom the Lord wanted them to, regardless of the price.

Christians who understand the forgiveness of God and the price paid for them on the Cross of Calvary have Holy Spirit enlightened hearts on God's direction for them and they have an enablement to pray through their mission.

In Acts 21:11-13 we read of Paul's willingness to take whatever comes his way for the sake of achieving God's plan for him. At this time in Christian history Paul is making his way to Jerusalem to fulfill God's will for him. In His farewell speech to the Ephesian elders Paul says, "And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me--the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace." (Acts 20:22-24)

In Acts 21 Paul has been staying at the house of the evangelist Philip, who was one of the Seven. (Acts 21:8) While in Caesarea the prophet Agabus comes to Paul and tells him what awaits in Jerusalem. The Bible says, "Coming over to us, [Agabus] took Paul's belt, tied his own hands and feet with it and said, 'The Holy Spirit says,

In this way the Jews of Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles.' When we heard this, we and the people there pleaded with Paul not to go up to Jerusalem.' Then Paul answered, 'Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.'" (Acts 21:11-13) The message from God through His faithful prophet gave Paul the confirmation he needed to achieve the Lord's will and call for him regardless of the response of those to whom he went to proclaim the gospel.

This is the same heart that is reflected in the life and speech of St. Patrick who said, “Am I willing and able to forgive those who have caused pain in my life? Am I willing to follow the call of God and even give my life to those who enslaved me?” Paul was about to go to Jerusalem where there would be uncertain turbulent times and St. Patrick was willing to go back to a place that held him slave to a warlord, working as a shepherd for six years.

It would be wrong to say or believe that every child of God who is greatly used by the Lord will face what the Apostle Paul and Patrick did. What the Holy Spirit wants you to ask yourself is, “Will you be found faithful to the work God has called you to regardless of the opposition you may face?”

Grow in their faith in turbulent times through prayer

Christians who follow God's call are worthy of our attention. So are Christians who grow in their faith in turbulent times through prayer. The Apostle Paul tells us, “We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life... But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and He will deliver us. On Him we have set our hope that He will continue to deliver us, as you helped us by your prayers...” (2 Corinthians 1:8-10)

The Apostle Paul and those serving the Lord with him were taken through some trials that caused them to even despair of life down here, yet they saw these trials as opportunities to see God do a powerful work in their lives and before mankind. The Apostle Paul underscored it forcefully to illustrate how powerless both he and the church are apart from God and the importance of prayers.

The Arabs have a proverb, “All sunshine makes a desert.” The danger of prosperity is that it encourages a false independence; it makes us think that we are able to handle life’s trials alone. William Barclay wrote, “For every one prayer that rises to God in days of prosperity, ten thousand rise in days of adversity.” During his presidency Abraham Lincoln said, “I have often been driven to my knees in prayer because I had nowhere else to go.”

Paul’s outcome and that of his fellow servants of Christ was they developed an unshakable confidence in the Lord and they rested in His unmovable faithfulness. Everyone who imitates Paul’s faith in Christ says as the psalmist who wrote, “For you O Lord, have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling, that I may walk before the Lord in the land of the living.” (Psalm 116:8-9)

St. Patrick said “Am I willing to draw closer to God in turbulent times.” It was during St. Patrick’s time in slavery that he grew to have faith in prayer. He wrote, “I would pray constantly during the daylight hours... and faith grew... During the day I would say as many as 100 prayers and at night only slightly less.”

Christians who imitate faith in Christ as Paul and St. Patrick did “Pray continually.”
(1 Thessalonians 5:17)

These Christians understand the truths presented by Christ when He said, “...And will not God bring about justice for His chosen ones, who cry out to Him day and night? Will He keep putting them off? I tell you, He will see that they get justice, and quickly.” However, when the Son of man comes, will He find faith upon the earth?”
(Luke 18:6)

Faith opens doors for *guidance*

Christians who grow in adversity and prayer have faith in Christ that is worth imitating. Such faith opens doors for *guidance*. Psalm 31:3 says, “Since you are my rock and my fortress, for the sake of your Name lead and guide me.” Psalm 73:24 says, “You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory.”

In his physical affliction of blindness, an outward symbol of his spiritual blindness, the Apostle Paul received divine direction. In Acts 9:12, “The Lord told [Ananias] ‘Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight.’” Ananias, being obedient to his vision from God went and placed his hands on Paul, who was healed and filled with the Holy Spirit.
(Acts 9:17-18)

It was God’s leading that led Paul to the place in his heart and life where he could be set free from spiritual and physical blindness, and it was God’s leading that enabled St. Patrick to find his freedom from six years of slavery. St. Patrick writes, “I use to pasture the flock each day. Praying in the icy coldness, in rain...

And it was there of course that one night in my sleep I heard a voice saying to me, ‘You do well to fast; soon you will depart for you home country.’ ...a short time later there was a voice prophesying, ‘Behold, your ship is ready’ And it is not close... two hundred miles away... ...Shortly thereafter I turned and fled... ...by the power of God who directed my route until I reached that ship.”

True faith in Christ and a walk in obedience opens the doors to freedom from all spiritual bondage, and as God wills, physical bondages.

The faith in Christ that Paul and St. Patrick expressed opened the doors for ministry guidance. It was in a vision Paul saw that Ananias was going to lay hands on him. It was through divine guidance Paul got his Macedonia call. Acts 16:9-10 says, “During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us.’” After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.”

It is encouraging for us to know that it was a divine leading that showed St. Patrick how to get to the ship that got him to the place the Lord wanted him to be, it was also a vision that moved St. Patrick back to Ireland to evangelize the people there.

St. Patrick writes, "...After a few years I was again in Britain with my parents... ..there in a vision of the night, I saw a man whose name was Victoricus coming as if from Ireland with innumerable letters, and he gave me one of them, and I read the beginning of the letter;

'The Voice of the Irish,' and as I was reading the beginning of the letter... it seems at that moment I could hear the voices of those who were beside the forest of Foclut which is near the western sea, and they were crying as if with one voice; 'We beg you, holy youth, that you shall come and walk among us again.' ...thus, I woke. 'Thanks be to God, because after so many years the Lord bestowed on them according to their cry.'" St. Patrick set his heart to complete his "Commission."

It should be noted that Divine revelations appear to have come to the people of God in different ways, through dreams or visions, (Acts 16:9,10; 18:9; 22:18-21) through an angel, (Acts 27:23) through prophets and teachers as led by the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:2, 21:11) and most often, through a strong leading of the Holy Spirit, prompting the child of God to complete a ministry with the Lord. It is imperative that any visions, a word spoken or promptings be checked to the whole counsel of God's Word before beginning to act upon them.

Christians who imitate the faith in Christ that Paul and St Patrick had begin first by getting right before God, focus on the "Great Commission, grow in trials and through prayer so they are able to hear and obey divine leading. We have over past years had people leave the Sunday morning service, hearing from the Lord and they have enjoyed the fellowship that comes with obedience to God's call.

Enjoy what only God can do

Imitating faith in Christ as Paul and St Patrick did opens doors for Christians to participate in the "Great Commission." It also enables the child of God to enjoy what only God can do. The Apostle Paul has a doxology in Ephesians that is worthy of our attention as we consider his faith in Christ.

He writes, "Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen." (Ephesians 3:20)

Paul presents before us the glorious picture of the bride of Christ. This world is not what God attended for it to be, it has opposing forces that try to discourage and put a stop to the work God has called His children to. It is God's perfect will that all come to repentance and he has personally revealed to us in Scripture to be a part of His great world wide work.

There is absolutely nothing Satan can throw at the Lord's church that God will not use to build the character needed for the soldiers of Christ. Listen to these confessions of St. Patrick as the Holy Spirit wants to use them as you consider God's call on your life. We all have the opportunity to imitate the faith in Christ that Paul and St. Patrick did. In my opinion St. Patrick became an Apostle to Ireland.

He writes: "Behold now I commend my soul to God who is faithful and for whom I perform my mission although being unknown, but God is no respecter of persons and He chose me for this service that I might be one of the least of his ministers [sent]." Christians do not need to be well known before God can use them, they need only to commit themselves to the God who is faithful.

As St. Patrick was allowing God to do a work in him and through him in prayer, he was attacked, He writes, "And then I was attacked by a goodly number of my elders... They brought against me after thirty years an occurrence I had confessed before becoming a deacon."

Satan is the accuser of the brethren (Revelations 12:10) and he will come against all Christians who choose to walk in obedience to the Lord's call.

There were many things that came up against St Patrick before he made it to Ireland and he shares why, "[That] I might come to the Irish people to preach the Gospel and endure insults from unbelievers... if I should be worthy. I am ready to give even my life without hesitation; and most willingly for His name." Christians who follow the faith of others in Christ will be tested and prepared for their calling.

The Lord blessed St. Patrick's faithfulness, thousands were baptized and directed to seek the holiness of God in their lives and the Lord ordained clergy through the ministry He gave to St. Patrick.

The Apostle Paul and St. Patrick expressed a faith in Christ that is worth considering and the Holy Spirit gives us permission to follow them as they followed God who called them, Christ who purchased them and the Holy Spirit who sanctifies them into the image of Jesus Christ.

All Christians can follow the faith in Christ that the Apostle Paul and St. Patrick had. They need only come to Christ in true repentance, have their focus on the "Great Commission, grow in tribulation through prayer, have spiritual ears to grasp God's call and trust in God to do more than they can even hope or ask for. Trust God for great things as we seek Him for souls to come to Christ in Norton and in our families.

Let us Pray!!!!

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