

HEROES AND HERETICS:
An 8-Week Course on Early Church History

WEEK 10 **May 1, 2016**
Teacher: **Pastor Pickens**

Patrick – Missions and Monasticism

Life:

- Proper name: Magonus Sucatus Patricius. Born in Britain about 389.
- Britain had been under Roman rule for about 350 years. Christianity and Roman society expanded into Britain. Due to unrest in the Roman Empire Britain had to guard itself against threats from the east and west.
- Patrick was born into what was at least a nominally Christian family.
- At 16 Patrick is taken as a slave by Irish raiders. He is sold as a slave in western Ireland and is given the responsibility of shepherding for 6 years.
 - “And there [in Ireland] the Lord opened the sense of my unbelief that I might at last remember my sins and be converted with all my heart to the Lord my God, who had regard for my abjection, and mercy on my youth and ignorance.”¹
- Patrick’s faith is learned in isolation. This will later influence his monastic leanings.
- Patrick escapes and makes his way back to his family. During this period of life he is saturated in the Word.
- Patrick has a growing burden for the Irish people and in 432 he returns as a missionary never to return to Britain again.
 - “I came to the people of Ireland to preach the Gospel, and to suffer insult from the unbelievers, bearing the reproach of my going abroad, and many persecutions even unto bonds, and to give my free birth for the benefit of others; and, should I be worthy, I am prepared to give even my life without hesitation and most gladly for his name, and it is there that I wish to spend it until I die, if the Lord would grant it to me.”² In Ireland Patrick’s preaching is used mightily. The message of the gospel spreads and many come to faith. “For I am very much God’s debtor, who gave me such great grace that many people were reborn in God through me.”³
- Difficulties in ministry on the Irish front and the Roman front. Patrick’s monastic dispositions challenge the ecclesiastical system of the time.
- Patrick spends the rest of his life in Ireland. Through his ministry there Celtic Christianity is consolidated and shaped in many ways. He passes away about 461.

Thought:

- Patrick underscores the sovereignty of God. God brings people to himself in faith (Acts 2:47; 16:14). The Lord sustains him.
 - “I fear none of these things because of the promises of heaven. I have cast myself into the hands of God Almighty, who rules everywhere, as the prophet says: ‘Cast thy thought upon God, and he will sustain thee.’”⁴
- Priority is placed upon missions.

¹¹ Patrick’s *Confessions* in Haykin, *Rediscovering the Church Fathers*, 140

² *Ibid.*, 141

³ *Ibid.*, 143

⁴ *Ibid.*, 144

- “I cannot be silent about the great benefits and the great grace which the Lord has deigned to bestow upon me in the land of my captivity; for this we can give to God in return after having been chastened by him, to exalt and praise his wonders before every nation that is anywhere under the heaven.”⁵
- Monasticism is expressed in Patrick’s own life and in his consolidation of the ministry in Ireland. Solitude, contemplation, nature as a means of knowing God, challenging world status and wealth are all emphasized. Abbots rather than Bishops hold authority.
- Patrick’s ministry is governed by Scripture. Scripture is his rule for faith and life.

Take Away:

- God is at work in our lives even during the darkest moments (James 1:2-4; 1 Peter 1:6-7). We may be sure that he always uses such moments for our blessing (Rom. 8:28).
- For the most part the Christian life is lived in the ordinary day in and day out of life (Ps. 23:2-3; Eph. 6:18-20). It is at once normal and glorious.
- Our evangelism should be controlled by love for God and love for others. The grandeur of the gospel should compel our sharing it with others (Rom. 10:5-17; Phil. 3:17-20).
 - “In the light, therefore, of our faith in the Trinity I must make this choice, regardless of danger I must make known the gift of God and everlasting consolation, without fear and frankly I must spread everywhere the name of God so that after my decease I may leave a bequest to my brethren and sons whom I have baptized in the Lord—so many thousands of people.”⁶

For Further Reading:

Dowley, Tim. *The History of Christianity*. Minneapolis: Lion Publishing, 1990.
 Haykin, Michael A. G. *Rediscovering the Church Fathers*. Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2011.
 McGrath, Alister E. *Historical Theology*. Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 1998.

⁵ Ibid., 144-45

⁶ Ibid., 146