

Shamrocks and Spirituality [Psalm 56]
Draft by Steve Carr [www.houseofcarr.com/thread]

INTRODUCTION

1. This week marks a most interesting holiday: St Patrick's Day.
 - a. It's taught in school's to relate Irish heritage
 - b. It's observed by college students and twentiy-somethings to excuse binge drinking
2. But the reality is we should honor one of the great missionaries in the history of the church
 - a. The irony of it all: St. Patrick wasn't even Irish; he was born in England circa 385.
 - b. Born into an aristocratic Christian family with massive homes and plenty of slaves.
 - c. And though referred as such, he's not even an official saint in the Catholic church.
 - 1) He is viewed as the patron saint of Ireland—as a regional sainthood.
3. There is a Psalm that outlines Patrick's approach to life
 - b. Today we examine Psalm 56, a prayer to the Lord for protection through strife

Verses 1-4

¹ Be merciful to me, my God, for my enemies are in hot pursuit; all day long they press their attack. ² My adversaries pursue me all day long; in their pride many are attacking me. ³ When I am afraid, I put my trust in you. ⁴ In God, whose word I praise—in God I trust and am not afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?

1. We have no idea what incident is being referred to in this Psalm
 - a. It's a Psalm of David who spent considerable time being pursued by adversaries.
 - 1) There is an incident from 1 Samuel in Gath which sounds similar.
 - 2) As we look at this story, it's likely not in the Bible.
 - b. Few of us can relate to this on a literal level: **we haven't had people were out to kill us.**
 - 1) There's an applicable aspect for us: sometimes, despite our efforts, we're hated.
 - 2) Can you relate? Do the words of this psalm strike familiar to you?
2. Perhaps you were unaware, but St. Patrick had considerable adversity inflicted upon him.
 - a. When Patrick was 16 years old, he was captured by Irish pirates.
 - 1) It was kidnapping, (likely brutal) that would've been impossible to solve
 - 2) The traffickers brought Patrick to Ireland and sold him into slavery.
 - 3) He worked for a Druid high priest & tended sheep on the chilly mountains of Ireland.
 - b. Though he was a rebellious youth, Patrick's faith was honed through this experience
 - 1) During a six years of captivity, he became devoted through constant prayer.
 - 2) His devotion to his faith gave him the strength to survive.
 - 3) For Patrick, this Psalm rang true: "I trust God. What can mere mortals do to me?"
3. It's difficult to be a Christian experiencing pursuit and persecution.
 - a. The visceral human response is to respond in violence. But this isn't Christ-like.
 - b. We can also respond with anger, but with no outlet, this can be worse than the attack.
 - c. Often times, as verse 3 reveals, we react with a posture of fear.
 - 1) And fear can be crippling, especially when there appears to be no way out.
4. What the Scriptures do here is advocate a more robust worldview.
 - a. When I align my fate to the Lord's, I see an eternal perspective that controls my fear.
 - 1) Man is capable of many evils, but it pales in comparison to the greatness of God.
 - b. So what is the source of your attack? And are you releasing your fear to the Lord?

VERSES 5-7

⁵ All day long they twist my words; all their schemes are for my ruin. ⁶ They conspire, they lurk, they watch my steps, hoping to take my life. ⁷ Because of their wickedness do not let them escape; in your anger, God, bring the nations down.

1. Vs 6 again describes fear from physical threat. Vs 5 describes a more calculated assault.
 - a. It's an attack through words—twisting his words and scheming for his ruin.
 - b. Fascinating that the attack of words is equated with the threat of violence.
 - 1) This is yet another reminder that “sticks and stones” is bunk. Words CAN cut.
 - c. Likely, this is what you and I relate with in this psalmist's lament.
 - 1) Likely we all have endured slander or gossip from people speaking ill of us.
 - 2) Verse 7 again reminds us not to seek revenge ourselves, but let God handle it.
2. After years of slavery and attack, Patrick felt it was time to “get even.”
 - a. It wasn't enacted through activity, but passivity, fleeing his slave master.
 - b. Leaving the master was easy, fleeing the island of Ireland would prove more difficult
 - 1) St. Patrick convinced some sailors to let him board their ship.
 - 2) After three days they abandoned ship in France and wandered for 28 days
 - 3) Finally Patrick's escape was complete and he was reunited with family in England.
 - c. Non-violently, Patrick was able to rectify the situation.
3. A note here about the more retributive wording of this psalm.
 - a. Verse seven's prayer to “bring the nations down,” has some violent undertones.
 - 1) Put it within the ANE concept and it makes sense, as justice was held by the mighty
 - 2) Such a prayer fit perfectly within a world where survival equaled godly blessing.
 - 3) For us today, it's important to look at the context for the response.
 - a) DON'T pray for the death of your enemy.
 - b) DO pray for God to enact control over the situations.
 - b. In the end, our goal is to entrust our persecutors to God.
 - 1) In a prayer ascribed to St. Patrick, we read this.

“I arise today through God's strength to pilot me; God's might to uphold me, God's wisdom to guide me, God's eye to look before me, God's ear to hear me, God's hand to guard me, God's way to lie before me, God's shield to protect me, God's host to save me from snares of devils, from temptations of vices, from everyone who shall wish me ill, afar and near, alone and in multitude.”

VERSES 8-11

⁸ Record my misery; list my tears on your scroll—are they not in your record?

⁹ Then my enemies will turn back when I call for help. By this I will know that God is for me.

¹⁰ In God, whose word I praise, in the LORD, whose word I praise—

¹¹ in God I trust and am not afraid. What can man do to me?

1. This is a fairly balanced psalm with some parallel elements to make the overall point.
 - a. We see verses 10&11 are a repetition of verse 4
 - b. Verse 8 is the central/key verse to this psalm.
 - 1) My persecution isn't hidden from God. He knows my struggle and tears.
 - 2) “On your scroll” is equivalent to “in your Scriptures”
 - c. Note that it all comes back to God: what can man do when you're in control.
2. Upon returning home from slavery, Patrick enrolled in seminary & became a minister.
 - a. Later God spoke to Patrick in a dream, commanding him to return to Ireland & preach
 - 1) The Catholic Church had given up on converting such “barbarians”
 - 2) Illiterate, drunken, fighting, perverted pagans who worshipped nature gods.
 - b. He returned a missionary, passionate to tell these people about the grace of Christ.
3. This is why we don't give Patrick enough credit: what would you do to your slave masters?
 - a. Patrick fled for freedom, but just couldn't stay away.
 - b. Where some saw enemies, Patrick saw souls.
 - c. Proverbs 25:21,22

“If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head, and the LORD will reward you.”

VERSES 12,13

¹²I am under vows to you, my God; I will present my thank offerings to you.

¹³For you have delivered me from death and my feet from stumbling, that I may walk before God in the light of life.

1. The end of this psalm has an element we saw a few weeks ago.
 - a. "I will present thanks," and "you have delivered me" project to future answers.
 - 1) This is what a solid faith should do: anticipate God's handling the situation.
 - b. The psalm ends in popular biblical metaphor about walking in the light.
 - 1) "The light of life is where we are called to dwell."
2. One of the folklore of Patrick: driving the snakes out of Ireland
 - a. But using biblical imagery, snakes were symbolic of evil and Patrick's evangelism did this.
 - 1) Patrick drove the darkness of the island.
 - b. By the time of his death at 77, Patrick had truly escaped those enemies.
 - 1) He had seen untold thousands of people convert.
 - 2) About one-fourth of Irish tribes had become substantially Christian.
 - 3) He had trained 1000 minister, planted hundreds churches.
 - 4) He was the first notable person in history to take a strong stance against slavery.
 - c. Through his ministry, he gave Ireland the opportunity to dwell in the light of life.

CONCLUSION

SO WHAT DOES THIS PSALM TEACH US? IT REMINDS US WHO'S IN CONTROL

1. When times of persecution are inflicted on us, we focus on ourselves.
 - a. We rack our brains to develop solutions, and maybe maneuver, but it never ends.
 - b. Right now, some of you feel the message of this psalm. Others will soon.
2. But the key to our lives is trusting the Lord. **WHAT CAN MERE MORTALS DO?**
 - a. And that's why I'm thankful that to look at this psalm around Patrick's this day.
 - b. St. Patrick lived out Psalm 56 and is a great example of letting God control all.
 - c. And his words affirm that it was all done in the name of Christ.

"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."

3. IMMERSE YOURSELF IN CHRIST. AND EVERYTHING ELSE BECOMES CLEAR

Transition to Communion:

On a day when people are prone to drunkenness, we have another feast.

- a. It's a feast where our consumption brings exuberance, but not because of spirits.
- b. It's because of the love of one who gave all to us.