

## Acts 21/22

At the end of Acts 20, we see Paul addressing the elders of Ephesus just before he departs from Miletus. He is telling them they will not see his face again. As Chase illustrated last week, this is a very sad moment - the picture of parents dropping their kids off at college for the first time. Before all of this he tells them in v.22-24

*“And now, behold, bound by the Spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me. But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God.” v.22-24*

This sounds VERY familiar...where have we heard this before? A man with a message, heading to Jerusalem, knowing that suffering awaits. Matthew 16:21-23

So, with that in mind, we pick up in Chapter 21. Take a look at the map on the screen to get an idea of how he broke up his trip and follow along as I read.

*1When we had parted from them and had set sail, we ran a straight course to Cos and the next day to Rhodes and from there to Patara; 2and having found a ship crossing over to Phoenicia, we went aboard and set sail. 3When we came in sight of Cyprus, leaving it on the left, we kept sailing to Syria and landed at Tyre; for there the ship was to unload its cargo. 4After looking up the disciples, we stayed there seven days; and they kept telling Paul through the Spirit not to set foot in Jerusalem.*

I want you to put a pin in that last line because I'm going to circle back around to that later.

Does anyone remember another place in the Bible where Tyre is mentioned? Well if you don't, Tyre and Sidon were traditionally wicked Gentile cities on which God had pronounced his judgment in the OT. In Luke 10:13 Jesus admonishes the people of the Jewish cities of Chorazin and Bethsaida for their unbelief after many signs and miracles had been performed there – and he cuts them down and contrasts them with the wicked Gentile cities “...if the miracles had been performed in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes.” Incredible foreshadowing of the grace offered to the gentiles from Christ himself and now Paul has disciples there with which to visit – only a few since he had to go looking for them, but there they were. Incredible.

*5When our days there were ended, we left and started on our journey, while they all, with wives and children, escorted us until we were out of the city. After kneeling down on the beach and praying, we said farewell to one another. 6Then we went on board the ship, and they returned home again.*

*7When we had finished the voyage from Tyre, we arrived at Ptolemais, and after greeting the brethren, we stayed with them for a day. 8On the next day we left and came to Caesarea, and entering the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, we stayed with him.*

This is the same Philip from Acts 6 who was (of good reputation, full of the spirit and of wisdom) appointed with Stephen and five others to take care of the poor in Jerusalem (deacons), evangelized to the Ethiopian eunuch on the road between Jerusalem and Gaza, and eventually made his way to Cesarea in Acts 8.

Notice in these passages how Paul is seeking out fellow believers where he can. I wonder why that is? In one word – FELLOWSHIP. John Piper says that “Fellowship is a mutual bond that Christians have with Christ that puts us in a deep, eternal relationship with one another.” And he’s right.

Through the blessings of Christ, we all share in a bond of unmerited grace – a favor with God bestowed upon us by no effort of our own.

Through sufferings for Christ, we share in a bond of burden for one another; lifting each other up in prayer, giving freely to one another of our time, talents, and finances, and motivating one another with wisdom and words of encouragement.

Any soldier (Brian, Jeremy, CR) or Boy Scout (Aaron) will quickly tell you the bonds they have with their unit/troop are some of the strongest they will ever know. They are brothers and sisters in a common struggle. They know each other’s faults, fears, strengths, weaknesses. They face adversity and hardship together, they share joy and laughter with each other, they rebuke, admonish, correct, and submit to one another. They love and encourage each other. In short, I think Paul, understanding the suffering to come, was leaning on his fellow believers – bonding with them; receiving prayer and encouragement from them – seeking out and experiencing the koinonia with them in the same way that a soldier would do with his family, close friends, and his unit before shipping off to war.

In the same way, if one of our families were to move to another state or city, what would be the first thing you would do after finding a home? RIGHT!! You’d look for a new church to fellowship with. It is a natural desire – we can’t help but feel the pull to it as a believer – we long for it. Why do you think Sherry and I have been driving 40 minutes, sometimes multiple times per week, for the last 20 years?

#### **POINT #1**

**FELLOWSHIP is a natural reaction to the bond we have in Christ. IT IS ESSENTIAL AND IT IS NECESSARY FOR THE GROWTH, MATURITY, AND STABILITY OF EVERY BELIEVER THAT FOLLOWS AFTER CHRIST AND HIS WILL.**

*9Now this man had four virgin daughters who were prophetesses. 10As we were staying there for some days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. 11And coming to us, he took Paul’s belt and bound his own feet and hands, and said, “This is what the Holy Spirit says: ‘In this way the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.’” 12When we had heard this, we as well as the local residents began begging him not to go up to Jerusalem. 13Then Paul answered, “What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.” 14And since he would not be persuaded, we fell silent, remarking, “The will of the Lord be done!”*

Considering this passage and circling back around to verse 4, we have clear warnings to Paul from his fellow believers NOT to go to Jerusalem.

v4. 4After looking up the disciples, we stayed there seven days; and they kept telling Paul through the Spirit not to set foot in Jerusalem.

So what do we do with this? It appears we may have a contradiction of message from the Holy Spirit, right? Let's look closer and then decide.

Acts 20:22

"And now, behold, bound by the Spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me.

Acts 21:4

"...and they kept telling Paul through the Spirit not to set foot in Jerusalem."

Acts 21:11

"...This is what the Holy Spirit says: 'In this way the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'" 12When we had heard this, we as well as the local residents began begging him not to go up to Jerusalem."

First, regarding Acts 20:22 and 21:11 – The distinction has to be made between the idea of "the Holy Spirit saying DO NOT GO" and "the Holy Spirit saying YOU WILL SUFFER WHEN YOU GO". In other words, just because the Holy Spirit warns of bonds and afflictions awaiting him WHEN he goes, does not mean the Holy Spirit is saying "DO NOT GO". It is a distinction between "prediction" and prohibition" It is clear in 20:22 that Paul knows that the Spirit is compelling him to go. In addition, God, in speaking with Ananias prior to Paul's arrival in Acts 9:16, tells Ananias that:

"...for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake."

Paul is under no misgivings about his suffering for Christ. He's already been through a lot of suffering as we have studied this series. So these two verses are not contradictory in the least; the message is not mixed; just two-fold - "YOU MUST GO" and "YOU WILL SUFFER WHEN YOU GET THERE".

So what do we do with 21:4? They were telling him through the Spirit not to go. Even Luke, the writer of this book as he is accounting this moment, says he joined in their plea in verse 12! I found that remarkable. Anyway, one way to understand what Luke may be trying to say with this statement "through the spirit" is what John Stott said in his commentary on Acts (I highly recommend this resource BTW):

"The warning is divine, but the urging was human". In other words, through the spirit they heard what was being foretold regarding Paul's imminent sufferings in Jerusalem, because of that, in their flesh they

were urging him not to go. I believe this is a sound argument against contradiction knowing that the scriptures, in their totality, teach over and over again that we will suffer for Christ's namesake. Look at what happened to the apostles; Paul's letters to the Thessalonians... "*we have been destined for this...when we were with you, we kept telling you in advance that we were going to suffer*". Also Christ – "*if they persecuted me, they are going to persecute you – the slave is not better than his master.*"

While we're on this topic of **through the spirit**...I just want to express a gentle word of caution about prophecy and prophesying things like "God told me to do X,Y,Z..." , "I received a word from the Lord for you...etc". In our fallen, emotional state, it is extremely easy to get things mixed up with our own feelings or our own personal preferences. Explaining the WRITTEN WORD of God scares me...I don't want to get it wrong; saying that I speak n BEHALF OF GOD in a particular situation makes me tremble.

For those, who wish to further chase the rabbit on biblical prophecy and prophesying, I'm going to include a link to a great article from The Gospel Coalition by Sam Storms in my manuscript online on our website...[www.roanokechurch.com](http://www.roanokechurch.com), so look for it early next week when this is published. Many great words of wisdom regarding Biblical prophecy. I'm certain that John Piper has some great words on this as well.

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/sam-storms-what-does-scripture-teach-about-office-prophet-gift-prophecy/>

Now, that we've addressed that, let's look again at Paul's response in verse 13:

*13Then Paul answered, "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." 14And since he would not be persuaded, we fell silent, remarking, "The will of the Lord be done!"*

Reminds me of Shadrach, Meshach, & Abednego in Daniel 3

*17"If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. 18"But even if He does not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up."*

Or Jesus in the Garden... "*If it is possible, let this cup pass from me...BUT not my will but YOURS be done.*"

## **Point #2**

As believers, we may disagree on a particular course of action, but in the end we must always defer to the will of God. We will wrestle.

Continuing on in verse 15...

*15After these days we got ready and started on our way up to Jerusalem. 16Some of the disciples from Caesarea also came with us, taking us to Mnason of Cyprus, a disciple of long standing with whom we were to lodge.*

*17After we arrived in Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. 18And the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present. 19After he had greeted them, he began to relate one by one the things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. 20And when they heard it they began glorifying God;*

I'd like to highlight here the interaction between Paul and the Jewish believers who received him and Luke – their reception was WITH GLADNESS and their immediate reaction to the news of the Gentile believers was to GLORIFY GOD. They were family – they understood what this was all about. They celebrated together. They had no misunderstanding about who was the author of this – GOD GETS THE CREDIT!!!

But then there seems to be a quick change of tone...

*and they said to him, “You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed, and they are all zealous for the Law; 21and they have been told about you, that you are teaching all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs. 22”What, then, is to be done? They will certainly hear that you have come. 23“Therefore do this that we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow; 24take them and purify yourself along with them, and pay their expenses so that they may shave their heads; and all will know that there is nothing to the things which they have been told about you, but that you yourself also walk orderly, keeping the Law. 25“But concerning the Gentiles who have believed, we wrote, having decided that they should abstain from meat sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from fornication.” 26Then Paul took the men, and the next day, purifying himself along with them, went into the temple giving notice of the completion of the days of purification, until the sacrifice was offered for each one of them.*

a word of caution to Paul about what the Jewish believers were saying about him...I can hear the conversation go something like this...*Paul, they're saying that you're telling the Gentiles not to circumcise...don't walk according to the Jewish customs...WE KNOW that these things don't grant you salvation or seal your place with Christ, that's what WE'VE been saying...WE understand that, but they don't get it 100% yet...the truth is we asked the Gentiles to make some concessions for the sake of their Jewish brothers in Christ (don't eat meat sacrificed to idols, blood from strangled meat, and fornication – that's out brother)...just as we have conceded some things to our Gentile brothers. So here's what we do to help them understand that they have the wrong idea – they're thinking about this all wrong.* And then they give him a recommendation as to how to resolve the problem. And Paul goes along with it. And you say “wait a minute Matt...has Paul forgotten that he is not under the Law and doesn't have to do these things?” Certainly NOT! Understand that this is Paul, once again, opening his hand and deferring to those around him for the sake of the Gospel.

*19For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more. 20To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are*

*under the Law; 21to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without law. 22To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some. 23I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it. 1 Cor. 9:19-23*

The four men were, for some reason, unclean and had to go through the proper procedure before entering the temple – there’s no indication in the scriptures why – could have been because they were hanging out with Gentiles prior to this – we just don’t know. This gives Paul an opportunity to show those who were already criticizing him that we’re on the same team...I will do this for you, even though I don’t have to or even want to...but I give up my liberty for the sake of some time with you. So here’s what happens next...

*27When the seven days were almost over, the Jews from Asia, upon seeing him in the temple, began to stir up all the crowd and laid hands on him, 28crying out, “Men of Israel, come to our aid! This is the man who preaches to all men everywhere against our people and the Law and this place; and besides he has even brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place.” 29For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with him, and they supposed that Paul had brought him into the temple. 30Then all the city was provoked, and the people rushed together, and taking hold of Paul they dragged him out of the temple, and immediately the doors were shut.*

Well, that went down hill fast (as my daughter says)...

*31While they were seeking to kill him, a report came up to the commander of the Roman cohort that all Jerusalem was in confusion.*

So, I’m going to put on my history hat and bore you for a moment. In case you didn’t know it, the Romans built the Antonia Fortress a mere 60 yards away from and overlooking the temple...not to protect it, but so that they could watch and spy on the Jews and react to them before they could descend into chaos – keep them at arms length. You know the old adage – keep your friends close and your enemies closer. This is a real place, BTW (for those who think the Bible is full of made up stories), and it is said to have housed over a 1,000 soldiers. A legion of Roman soldiers consisted of 10 cohorts, the first of which (lead element) was 800 men strong with 5 centurions (160 men/centurion), the remaining 9 were only about 480 men strong with 3 centurions in each. The commander of the Roman cohort was typically the commander of the first cohort, being the senior officer in charge at the Antonia Fortress. We learn later in Acts 23:26 that this man’s name is Claudius Lysias.

*32At once he took along some soldiers and centurions and ran down to them; and when they saw the commander and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul. 33Then the commander came up and took hold of him, and ordered him to be bound with two chains; and he began asking who he was and what he had done. 34But among the crowd some were shouting one thing and some another, and when he could not find out the facts because of the uproar, he ordered him to be brought into the barracks. 35When he got to the stairs, he was carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the mob; 36for the multitude of the people kept following them, shouting, “Away with him!”*

*37As Paul was about to be brought into the barracks, he said to the commander, "May I say something to you?" And he said, "Do you know Greek? 38"Then you are not the Egyptian who some time ago stirred up a revolt and led the four thousand men of the Assassins out into the wilderness?"*

I want to pause here and marvel at God and his gift to Luke in the attention to detail that Luke is known for in his writings. I'm going to chase an apologetic rabbit for a second because we can all learn something from this little Easter Egg about an Egyptian that Luke included in the conversation that he records. It doesn't have anything to do with the sermon, I just want to go here for a minute because I'm a nerd.

When examining ANY ancient writings, Historiography (the study of historical writings) demands that we apply three tests to determine the veracity/reliability of the content.

Bibliographical Test (in other words, how consistent and reliable are the copies we have – how well do the number of extant manuscripts we have line up with each other in content, how close do they date to the original incidents recorded – remember, we don't have the originals – we have copies of the originals).

Internal Evidence Test (in other words, examination of the claims of the document for fraud, error, or contradiction – are the claims of the writing blatantly false and/or contradictory to each other)

External evidence test (in other words, do other separate historical materials confirm or deny the internal evidence of the document). Sometimes the internal and external tests overlap...and this is one of those times. Look again at verse 38...

*"Then you are not the Egyptian who some time ago stirred up a revolt and led the four thousand men of the Assassins out into the wilderness?"*

It's a little known fact that a mention of this revolt (led by a self proclaimed prophet from Egypt) is confirmed in the annals of history, SEPARATE FROM THE BIBLE, by another credible historian. In particular, the 1<sup>st</sup> century Romano-Jewish historian Flavius Josephus writing in the first century (about the time of all of the events recorded here in Acts) gives us this account in his Jewish Antiquities Series 20.8.5-6 (War 2.13.5-6):

*"These deeds of the robbers filled the city with all sorts of impiety. And now conjurers and deceivers persuaded the multitude to follow them into the wilderness, and pretended that they would show them manifest wonders and signs that would be performed by the providence of God. And those that were deceived suffered the pain of their folly, for Felix brought them back and punished them. At this time there came out of Egypt to Jerusalem a man who said he was a prophet, and advised the multitude of the common people to go along with him to the mountain called the Mount of Olives, which lay a distance of five furlongs from the city. He said that he would show them that at his command the walls of Jerusalem would fall down, through which he promised that he would procure them an entrance into the city. Now when Felix was informed of this he ordered his soldiers to take up their weapons, and with a great number of*

horsemen and footmen from Jerusalem he attacked the Egyptian and the people that were with him. He slew four hundred of them and took two hundred alive. But the Egyptian himself escaped from the fight and did not appear any more. And again the robbers stirred up the people to make war with the Romans.”

So there you have it, an event in time recorded in the Bible that is also recorded and expounded upon in another historical document that is considered reliable...it's here on the screen...I'm not going to read it, but it is specifically about an:

Egyptian man

leading a mass of people

from Jerusalem

into the wilderness

Stirring up a revolt

Both accounts indicating that the Egyptian was still at large.

All this just to show you that the Bible is a reliable work of antiquity containing names, places, events, and historical facts that are accounted for elsewhere in ancient writings. Now that I've totally side tracked us, lets get back to Paul and the Commander of the Cohort...

*39But Paul said, "I am a Jew of Tarsus in Cilicia (both real places – on the southern end of what is now called Turkey), a citizen of no insignificant city (more on this later); and I beg you, allow me to speak to the people."*

Here, Paul is making an appeal to the commander of the cohort he's using his status as a citizen of Tarsus, and his education in the Greek to be able to speak to the people...verse 40

*40When he had given him permission, Paul, standing on the stairs, motioned to the people with his hand; and when there was a great hush, he spoke to them in the Hebrew dialect,*

And now he is about to appeal to the audience that wants to kill him — AND speak in the native Hebrew tongue of his accusers to also bend their ears to what he has to say.

FLIP OVER TO Acts 22

*1"Brethren and fathers, hear my defense which I now offer to you."*

Note the tone as Paul addresses the mob that wants to kill him...he calls them bretheren and fathers...these are terms of unity and respect/submission...he doesn't say "hey idiots, knuckleheads, and scoundrels..." (A gentle answer turns away wrath... Proverbs 15:1)



Paul doesn't hate these people who wish to do him harm, he loves them and wishes that they would come to Christ.

*2And when they heard that he was addressing them in the Hebrew dialect, they became even more quiet; and he said,*

He is appealing to their sense of identity as a Jewish people. If you've ever been to a foreign country, you will notice how appreciative the natives are when you try to speak their language. It's a simple thing really, but it shows respect for them and their culture; even if you butcher it; the idea that you made effort is good – not only have you come to their country, you're trying to understand them and speak so that they can understand you.

*3'I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated under Gamaliel (Guh MA liel), strictly according to the law of our fathers, being zealous for God just as you all are today. 4'I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and putting both men and women into prisons, 5as also the high priest and all the Council of the elders can testify. From them I also received letters to the brethren, and started off for Damascus in order to bring even those who were there to Jerusalem as prisoners to be punished.*

Paul is explaining the breadth of his Jewish pedigree (and it is very impressive) – and he is doing it in a way that is civil and rife with sensitivity...not to elevate himself above, but to say in a sense that "I am one of you" – a Jew of Jews. Gamaliel, was a Pharisee Doctor of Jewish Law – in Jewish tradition he bore the title Rabban (our master) – holding a position of great authority in the Jewish high court in the first century. Remember from chapter 5, Gamaliel is the guy who came to the defense of Peter and the Apostles when they were brought before his council for preaching about Jesus, recommending their release saying "stay away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or action is of men, it will be overthrown; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them; or else you may even be found fighting against God." If you were a student under Gamaliel, you were all that and a bag of chips in regard to knowing, understanding, and practicing Jewish Law. The crème de la crème. It's like studying theology under men like Piper, or apologetics under men like Ravi Zacharias. Paul was also zealous for God like them...persecuting Christians unto death, binding, pursuing, imprisoning, heading to Damascus with letters to bring back prisoners to be punished...

### **POINT #3**

For the sake of the gospel and our Christian witness, we must always respond righteously to our critics (i.e. with compassion as for a soul bound for eternity in hell, with love as for a brother, with respect as for a father, and with gentleness as for a child.) Suffer righteously.

Paul continues in 6 through 11 about his experience on the road to Damascus...(DON'T READ IT, SKIP)

*6'But it happened that as I was on my way, approaching Damascus about noontime, a very bright light suddenly flashed from heaven all around me, 7and I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?' 8'And I answered, 'Who are You, Lord?' And He said to me, 'I am Jesus the Nazarene, whom you are persecuting.' 9'And those*

*who were with me saw the light, to be sure, but did not understand the voice of the One who was speaking to me. 10“And I said, ‘What shall I do, Lord?’ And the Lord said to me, ‘Get up and go on into Damascus, and there you will be told of all that has been appointed for you to do.’ 11“But since I could not see because of the brightness of that light, I was led by the hand by those who were with me and came into Damascus.*

Paul is pleading with his fellow Jewish people...Listen to what I heard and saw!!! Listen to what the witnesses with me experienced and saw. He continues on about Ananias...a man who was devout by every standard of the law (DON'T READ IT, SKIP)

*12“A certain Ananias, a man who was devout by the standard of the Law, and well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there, (Paul invoking Ananias’ pedigree to help his case) 13came to me, and standing near said to me, ‘Brother Saul, receive your sight!’ And at that very time I looked up at him. 14“And he said, ‘The God of our fathers has appointed you to know His will and to see the Righteous One and to hear an utterance from His mouth. 15‘For you will be a witness for Him to all men of what you have seen and heard. 16‘Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name.’*

Again...Listen to what Ananias heard and saw!!!

And in 17 -20, explaining to the people what he saw when he returned to Jerusalem the first time, Paul is about to throw some gasoline on the fire...not intentionally, but because

*17“It happened when I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, that I fell into a trance,18and I saw Him saying to me, ‘Make haste, and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about Me.’ 19“And I said, ‘Lord, they themselves understand that in one synagogue after another I used to imprison and beat those who believed in You. 20‘And when the blood of Your witness Stephen was being shed, I also was standing by approving, and watching out for the coats of those who were slaying him.’ 21“And He said to me, ‘Go! For I will send you far away to the Gentiles.’”*

With this statement, This statement was ABSOLUTELY an affront to the Jewish people. As we have already learned, their disdain for the Gentiles burned at the mere mention of them – almost a seething anger. They hated these people. This infuriated them. With this statement Paul essentially put the Jewish people on equal footing with the Gentiles – this is a no no – you just lost me there Paul. We’re not the same!!! The Gentiles must become Jews first!!! They are the wicked ones. We are God’s chosen...Abraham’s sons...we have no other testimony that WE NEED to hear.

*22They listened to him up to this statement, and then they raised their voices and said, “Away with such a fellow from the earth, for he should not be allowed to live!” 23And as they were crying out and throwing off their cloaks and tossing dust into the air 24the commander ordered him to be brought into the barracks, stating that he should be examined by scourging so that he might find out the reason why they were shouting against him that way.*

*25But when they stretched him out with thongs, Paul said to the centurion who was standing by, “Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman and uncondemned?” 26When the centurion heard this, he went to the commander and told him, saying, “What are you about to*

*do? For this man is a Roman.” 27The commander came and said to him, “Tell me, are you a Roman?” And he said, “Yes.”*

I have to stop and chase another rabbit here, because it’s important to my last point. Some history to put it in context:

Roman citizenship brought with it the privilege of legal trial to defend oneself. The right to appeal court decisions all the way up to the Caesar. Under 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC Porcian Laws, a Roman citizen could NOT be tortured or whipped unless he was found guilty of treason.

How is it that Paul, a Jew, is also a Roman citizen you ask? Well, in short, we don’t exactly know, but...

There were a few ways to become a Roman citizen.

One can be born a Roman citizen (both parents Roman citizens).

One could purchase their citizenship by gaining audience with the Emperor through expensive gifts to members of the inner imperial courts – some argue that the commander of the cohort in this passage, Claudius Lysias’ name is evidence enough to assume that he was conferred his citizenship by Emperor Claudius (AD 41 – AD 54).

One could serve in the Roman Army for 25 years to earn it (25 years was the requirement for Roman military service).

Roman citizenship can also be conferred upon emancipation of a slave from the house of a Roman citizen.

*28The commander answered, “I acquired this citizenship with a large sum of money.”*

He could be saying “I had to pay a big price for my citizenship”.

He may be lamenting how invaluable Roman citizenship had become – he had to pay a lot of money to get his and here this Jew has it.

He could have just been questioning HOW Paul, a Jew, could have acquired this status.

*And Paul said, “But I was actually born a citizen.”*

Well how can this be? Some have suggested that Paul’s ancestors may have been freedmen from among thousands of Jews who emperor Pompey took as slaves when he conquered Tarsus in 63 BC, conferring upon them the Roman citizenship status, but we don’t really know. It’s interesting to ponder, though.

AND because a false claim of citizenship was punishable by death, it is reasonable to see why the commander (Claudius Lysias) immediately believed Paul, as we see by their response in verse 29.

*29Therefore those who were about to examine him (the Romans were noteworthy for using torture to question witnesses) immediately let go of him; and the commander also was afraid when he found out that he was a Roman, and because he had put him in chains.*

It was a crime to even chain a citizen before a pre-trial...much less bind him in thongs in preparation for a flogging. So these guys knew they were in trouble if Paul wanted to make a big deal about it.

*30But on the next day, wishing to know for certain why he had been accused by the Jews, he released him and ordered the chief priests and all the Council to assemble, and brought Paul down and set him before them.*

Now to my point. It's no accident that Paul is here. A Jewish man, born a Roman citizen in one of the most prestigious cities in all of Rome (Tarsus of Cilicia: known for heavy Greek influence, an intellectual center with its own academy, palaces, marketplaces, baths, etc.), educated under a superpower of a Jewish legal scholar in Gamaliel, hunter and persecutor of Christians, ambassador of the Gospel to the Gentiles...soon to be bending the ear of Roman leadership with an opportunity to bring Christ front and center before the Jewish high counsel. So what if he is in chains – he was told it would be this way? Would we lament our bonds if we were given audience to Kim Jong Un, Vladimir Putin, Bebe Netanyahu for the sake of Christ? Would we pass up the opportunity knowing that it could mean our lives? Would we be so bold as Paul to “die for the sake of Christ”.

Psalms 37:23 tells us that “The steps of a man are established by the Lord, and He delights in his way.”

Without a doubt, I believe that God in His sovereignty ordered every moment Paul's life to prepare the way for His word to be heard by the Gentiles, the Jews, the Romans, and ultimately Matt Holland in Wakefield Baptist Church in 1986. Can you imagine a scenario of chance by which all of these important pieces of one man's background would culminate to a point in time where the message he brings is before so many people of great importance and influence as to change the lives of millions for generations to come? I cannot. Therefore...

#### **Point #4**

**We must understand that our position in life (whatever that situation is) is ordained by God and is intended to be used to the fullest for the advancement of the gospel and for the glory of Him.**

Praise God for Paul's life and obedience to effectively use that which he was given, even in face of great suffering and persecution. May WE also look closely at ourselves and where God has placed us and what God has given us and use them to the fullest for the sake of Christ.

Sherry's mom story.

Paul's message to Jews and Gentiles alike is that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. To pay a ransom for us – to be our substitution. He lived a life and died a death that we should have because of our sin. He rose again to conquer sin and death and make us righteous before a just and holy God – our maker and creator – and that if we repent of our sins and believe in Him, His death, and resurrection, we may be saved from judgment and hell. Paul spoke and wrote of all that he had seen and heard. His and the eyewitness testimonies of others like him are written in the Bible; and I believe it to be divinely

inspired and true. If you are an unbeliever here today, and you want to know more about this Jesus that I speak about, please come talk to me or any of our other pastors after the service.

Prayer – Lord, we are truly in awe of your work. What a magnificent and glorious God you are. We are thankful for your will for our lives that is so clearly laid out in the scriptures, for the men and women who, by the Holy Spirit, came before us and were obedient to your call. Father thank you for ordering our steps and our lives –help us to use that to the fullest for your glory. May the testimony of what you have done for us forever be on our lips. Through the Holy Spirit, help us to ALWAYS respond righteously to our critics, and help us to chase after your will and be fearless in its pursuit.