

## 78. Paul Said He Was a Roman Citizen

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children discover the purpose that God has for their lives just as the Lord showed Paul the purpose that He had for the life of Paul. When Christians realize that Christ has a purpose for each one of our lives, we will find great joy as we discover that purpose that gives our lives great meaning and purpose. Paul was willing to die and almost did during the day that is covered in the last part of Acts 21 and all of Acts 22. The last words that Paul spoke to the Jews that day were, “Depart, for I will send you far from here to the Gentiles.” In this topic, we will see what happened to Paul during the rest of that day.

Acts 22:22-24 says, “And they listened to him until this word, and *then* they raised their voices and said, ‘Away with such a *fellow* from the earth, for he is not fit to live!’ Then, as they cried out and tore off *their* clothes and threw dust into the air, the commander ordered him to be brought into the barracks, and said that he should be examined under scourging, so that he might know why they shouted so against him.” The moment that Paul mentioned the Gentiles, the Jews immediately stopped listening to him. Since the Jews that tried to kill Paul that day had rejected Jesus, they did not have the love of Christ in their lives. Instead, they were filled with hatred as soon as Paul mentioned the Gentiles to them. In fact, they were again ready to kill Paul.

We see that the Jews showed their anger in two ways. First, they showed their anger by the words that they spoke. Their words were actually the statement of a death penalty. They said that his life should be taken off the earth. They said that he was not even fit to continue to live. The only other place the word “fit” is used in the New Testament is Romans 1:28 where we read, “And even as they did not like to retain God in *their* knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting.” Then, we have a list of sins that are the result of a debased mind. As a result, in this passage the Jews said that Paul was so evil that he should not be allowed to live.

Second, they showed their anger by their actions. In their anger, they tore off their clothes. This was the very same thing that the Jews had done when they stoned Stephen. The Jews had taken off their outer robes and laid them at the feet of Paul so that they could stone Stephen. Acts 7:58 says, “And they cast *him* out of the city and stoned *him*. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.” They also threw dust into the air. This had been one of the ways that Jews had shown their anger for at least a thousand years. 2 Samuel 16:13 says, “And as David and his men went along the road, Shimei went along the hillside opposite him and cursed as he went, threw stones at him and kicked up dust.” Their actions made it very clear that they were ready to stone Paul immediately even though there were Roman soldiers right there.

The chief captain immediately ordered the soldiers to bring Paul into the barracks. He had not understood what Paul had said since he spoke in the Aramaic language. However, he could see by the anger of the people that they were ready to kill him. As a result, the chief captain ordered his men to examine Paul by scourging him. A Roman scourging was one of the ways that the Romans got prisoners to confess to their crimes. The whip that was used for this kind of a beating

had pieces of sharp metal tied to the pieces of leather. These pieces of sharp metal would severely cut the prisoner and many prisoners died from a Roman scourging. The chief captain felt that this would cause Paul to confess to a crime that would give him a reason to put Paul to death and please the Jews, because he had seen the great hatred that the Jewish leaders had for Paul.

Acts 22:25-26 says, “And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said to the centurion who stood by, ‘Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman, and uncondemned?’ When the centurion heard that, he went and told the commander, saying, ‘Take care what you do, for this man is a Roman.’” The Romans had a law that if anyone claimed to be a Roman citizen when the person was not that the person would be put to death. As a result, no one claimed to be a Roman citizen unless the claim was true. Paul immediately asked the Roman centurion who was in charge, “Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman, and uncondemned?” Suddenly, that question changed everything.

The centurion immediately went to the commander and said, “Take care what you do, for this man is a Roman.” The Romans also had a very severe penalty for anyone who would order the scourging of a Roman citizen. Acts 16:37-38 says, “But Paul said to them, ‘They have beaten us openly, uncondemned Romans, *and* have thrown *us* into prison. And now do they put us out secretly? No indeed! Let them come themselves and get us out.’ And the officers told these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Romans.” The reason that the Roman commanders were fearful in both situations was due to the fact that such an offense could result in the ending of a military career and even included the possibility of death. As a result, this statement brought great fear to the commander since he had ordered Paul bound.

The commander immediately came to talk to Paul. Acts 22:27-29 says, “Then the commander came and said to him, ‘Tell me, are you a Roman?’ He said, ‘Yes.’ The commander answered, ‘With a large sum I obtained this citizenship.’ And Paul said, ‘But I was born a *citizen*.’ Then immediately those who were about to examine him withdrew from him; and the commander was also afraid after he found out that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him.” Here, we see that the first thing that the Roman commander wanted to know was if Paul was really a Roman citizen. As a result, the commander said, “Tell me, are you a Roman?” Paul replied and told him that he was a Roman citizen.

Lysias, the Roman commander, said that he had paid a large amount of money in order to buy his Roman citizenship. It was not actually legal to buy Roman citizenship. Sometimes, Roman officials could be bribed by a large amount of money to give citizenship to a person, especially if that person was a high-ranking officer. Lysias said that it had cost him a large amount of money to become a Roman citizen so he had probably bribed some other Roman official who had granted him that citizenship.

Paul said that he had been born a Roman citizen. This meant that the father of Paul had also been a Roman citizen. The city of Tarsus had been granted a charter for their city by Julius Caesar called “Juliopolis”. Some think that this charter may also have included Roman citizenship. There were also some Jews that had earned Roman citizenship by bravery in the military. We do not

know for sure how the father of Paul, or some earlier relative, had gained Roman citizenship; through whatever way, it happened the father of Paul was a Roman citizen. As a result, Paul was already a citizen at the time he was born, because his father was a Roman citizen.

As soon as Paul told the commander that he was a Roman citizen, the soldiers that were going to examine him by scourging immediately left Paul and the commander. They did not want to be held accountable for the scourging of a Roman citizen. The Roman commander was also afraid. He knew the possible consequences for even putting chains on a Roman citizen. He certainly did not want to be responsible for scourging him as well. Here, we see that the commander was forced to act with fear, because of what he had already done to Paul by putting him in chains.

However, it was necessary for the Roman commander to find out what crimes the Jewish people were accusing Paul of committing so that he could tell the Roman governor. Acts 22:30 says, “The next day, because he wanted to know for certain why he was accused by the Jews, he released him from *his* bonds, and commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear, and brought Paul down and set him before them.” The Roman commander wanted to find out as quickly as possible the crimes that the Jewish religious leaders were accusing Paul of committing.

The very next day, the Roman commander commanded the chief priests and the entire council to appear before him. Here, we see that the Roman commander had now called a meeting of the entire Sanhedrin to meet with him so that he could try and find out what crimes they were accusing Paul of committing. This was the same council of 70 that had beaten the other apostles many years earlier. Acts 5:40 says, “And they agreed with him, and when they had called for the apostles and beaten *them*, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.” Gamaliel had warned the earlier council that they could not stop the apostles if what they were teaching was of God. Some of the older men may have even remembered what Gamaliel had said many years earlier. However, that did not stop them from trying to kill Paul at this time.

The next day, the Roman commander brought Paul from the Roman fortress to examine him before the Jewish Sanhedrin. We will see that Paul is given the opportunity to speak to the Sanhedrin. Paul had probably known many of the men that were now on the Sanhedrin when he was a young man. Some of the men on the Sanhedrin had probably even helped him in his efforts to persecute the early followers of Jesus in order to try and stop them from teaching about the death and resurrection of Christ. We will see that Paul was not afraid as he spoke to them. In the same way, we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to yield to the Lord moment by moment so that they can speak about the death and resurrection of Christ with great courage. The Lord will work mightily through their lives as they speak about the resurrection of Christ with boldness and not with fear. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children how you depend on the Lord so that you speak about Christ with boldness.