

- **Today's story is a story of two men who discover they have something in common, but the way they each came to possess this commonality could not have been more different.**
- **The first is Roman commander in charge of Jerusalem garrison, responsible for maintaining peace amidst the growing civil unrest in the city. As our story opens he is preparing to torture a prisoner for information.**
- **The second man is the one about to get tortured, and of course, he is the Apostle Paul.**
- **What they have in common is that they are both Roman Citizens. The commander is shocked to learn this, but even more shocked to learn the difference in how they became citizens.**
  
- **For us today, this story sheds further light on Paul's great desire and faithfulness to share the truth about Jesus Christ, and points us to the greater New Covenant reality of our true citizenship and identity as disciples of Jesus Christ.**
  
- **THAT'S where we are going, but first, Sunday March 20, PE, TO, thanks for joining with us.**
  
- **Start where we left off last week. A massive riot has erupted on the temple mount after Paul's adversaries spotted him in the temple-would have killed him if not for the protection of the Roman guards. Paul gets the commander's permission to address the crowd, and after capturing the crowd's attention, proceeds to share the story of his conversion on the road to Damascus, now 23 years in the past. Paul ended his talk- or more likely was interrupted- when he declared that because the Jewish people of Jerusalem had rejected the message about Jesus, God had called him to take the gospel- the Good News of God's blessing- to the gentiles.**
  
- **When Paul said this, the crowd erupted, declaring...**

✠ **Not fit to live** Acts 22:22 *The crowd listened to Paul until he said this. Then they raised their voices and shouted, "Rid the earth of him! He's not fit to live!"*

- **We should be slow to pass judgment on the people of this crowd. Remember, to them Paul represented a complete betrayal of their Jewish identity, the Mosaic Law, their traditions, and circumcision which represented their covenant with God going back to Abraham himself!**
- **More personal, Jerusalem's rejection of the Gospel illustrates the power of traditions and entrenched ways of thinking to sometimes blind us to the work God is doing right in front of us. In his commentary on Acts, theologian Darrell Bock says this (I agree)..**

*"A danger of longtime practice or belief that has established itself as a tradition is that it can undercut the very faith it is supposed to support. The unwillingness of Paul's opponents to consider what God was doing right then... made them unwilling and unable to respond to God's hope (purpose) designed for THEM. This is tradition gone bad, as it creates both blindness and stubbornness."*

- **Jerusalem's PRIDE of tradition in their day is a call to great humility in how we consider how God is working in the challenges and issues of our day.**

- **In ANY case, Paul is ushered away from the furious crowd, and as the Roman commander starts to interrogate him the ‘Roman way’- for only the SECOND time in all our story- Paul invokes his Power of...**

#### † The power of citizenship

**Acts 22:23-26** As they were shouting and throwing off their cloaks and flinging dust into the air (**really angry- utter rejection**), <sup>24</sup> the commander ordered that Paul be taken into the barracks. He directed that he be flogged and interrogated in order to find out why the people were shouting at him like this.

- **NIV softens this a bit. A more literal translation is that Paul was going to be ‘interrogated BY flogging’- basically, beat the truth out of him. The standard roman instrument of flogging- our scourging- was a wooden handle with multiple leather strips, each tipped with pieces of metal or bone chips- called a ‘flaggelatio’, or ‘flagella’. This likely happened in the stone courtyard of the barracks called the ‘Gabbatha’- and it wouldn’t have been lost on Paul that this was the same location- and way- that Jesus had been flogged before his crucifixion.**
- **It’s at this point, as he is being stretch out to be flogged, that Paul finally notes his citizenship.**

<sup>25</sup>As they stretched him out to flog him, Paul said to the centurion standing there, “Is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen who hasn’t even been found guilty?” <sup>26</sup> When the centurion heard this, he went to the commander and reported it. “What are you going to do?” he asked. (**Greek- “do you know what you are about to do?”**) “This man is a Roman citizen.”

- **Paul’s statement completely changes the dynamic. A claim of Roman citizenship was a powerful thing.**
- **As we discussed back in Acts 16, Paul probably didn’t have physical proof of citizenship on him. The proof of his citizenship was that he was willing to make the claim- because if he was lying, it would be eventually found out, and the penalty of such a false claim would be death.**
- **In Paul’s time Roman Citizenship came with multiple rights that were rare in the first century, including what we would consider basic human rights such as protection from punishment without a trial.**
- **On a deeper level, both then and now, citizenship represented a sense of belonging- an identity and purpose. As a citizen I have both rights and responsibilities, and I am part of something larger than myself- and this something is a source of meaning and security- I’m not all on my own in the world.**
- **In the Mediterranean world whether or not you were a Roman citizen had a profound impact on your life, and the lives of your family. Same is true today.**
- **That said, in the Roman world there were TWO kinds of citizen, as our story goes on to reveal...**

#### † Two kinds of citizen

**Acts 22:27-29** The commander went to Paul and asked, “Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?” “Yes, I am,” he answered. <sup>28</sup> Then the commander said, “I had to pay a lot of money for my citizenship.”

“But I was born a citizen,” Paul replied. <sup>29</sup> Those who were about to interrogate him withdrew immediately. The commander himself was alarmed when he realized that he had put Paul, a Roman citizen, in chains.

- *This gets interesting- I want us to contrast these two men- both who are Roman citizens, but whose place in life couldn't have been more different.*

**The Commander**                      **Paul**

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**Citizenship is ACHIEVED** – He obtained it himself.

- *From what we know of Roman political dynamics of the day, it's a safe bet that the guard bought his citizenship in the form of a BRIBE. During the reign of Emperor Claudius such bribes were frequent, and the goal was for your name to be written on a list the emperor would approve- which he had done.*
- *FOR PAUL, on the other hand, his citizenship was*

**Citizenship is INHERITED**

- *Being born in the Roman Empire didn't itself make you a citizen. Your parents- particularly your father- had to be a citizen as well. In this case the fathers' rights and privilege's as a citizen were passed to the child, who became a citizen by inheritance. WHAT WAS TRUE OF THE FATHER, BECAME TRUE OF THE CHILD. (keep that in mind)*

**Citizenship is INSECURE**

- *Because the commanders citizenship was purchased, he was therefore beholden to whoever he had bribed- making his status of citizenship INSECURE.*
- *If your citizenship was a bribe or political favor, and if you didn't play political game right - what was purchased could possibly be revoked.*
- *BOTTOM LINE- The guard's citizenship did gain him important rights, but due to the way it was obtained, it also could land him in a place of political bondage.*
- *FOR PAUL, on the other hand, his citizenship is*

**Citizenship is SECURE**

- *Paul didn't do anything to receive his citizenship- and so it could not easily be taken away. It was his right by birth, by virtue of his father.*

- *FOR THE COMMANDER, his citizenship meant he was*

**Bound to CAESAR** (Caesar being in title of all emperors)

- *The commanders ultimate security, purpose, and identity was bound up in his dependence upon ROME, and the ultimate authority of the Emperor- NERO*
- *For Paul, on the other hand- while politically bound to Rome and receiving the protection of a Roman citizen- he understood his ultimate citizenship was in Heaven- and so when it came to his security, purpose, and identity, Paul was...*

**Bound to GOD**

- *Finally, we in these two men very different dispositions. Both are Roman citizens, but in the commander- WHO in this dynamic seemed to be the person in control and with great power- he is STRESSED.*

**STRESSED**

- *WHAT IS HAPPENING HERE! What will happen to me if I do this WRONG?*

- *Paul, on the other hand- even though he is in danger of great physical harm, AND isn't going to be set free even after his Roman citizenship is known... Paul is...*

#### **At PEACE**

- *Again- consider this scene. We are told Paul has been stretched out for flogging. He is bound, possibly between two posts, arms and legs stretched out for maximum harm by the whip. It's likely he is naked- in a place of complete helplessness and humiliation.*
- *AND YET- in that moment, I'm convinced running through Paul's heart and mind were the words he would soon write to the church in Philippi- what we know as the powerful calling of Philippians 4:5-7*

*Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

- *From any human perspective, Paul here was helpless- dependent on the integrity of the commander and his status as a Roman citizen.*
- *But Paul could be at peace- NOT ANXIOUS- because his true dependence and trust was in God, and he knew his true citizenship was in Heaven.*
- *OK... I'm speaking now to us as believers. In the challenges, concerns, and many potential sources of anxiety we face today- what do we FUNCTIONALLY consider to be our true citizenship- our true source of security, identity, and purpose?*
- *I am proud, and deeply grateful, to be a citizen of the United States. This is something that never should be taken for granted.*
- *But as disciples of Jesus, our true citizenship isn't with the USA, it is in the Kingdom of God. For all the security and freedoms associated with my identity as an American, these can be taken away- and for that matter- they are not shared by some people of different life situations who share my identity as an American.*
- *But our identity in Christ- our salvation- This cannot be taken away, because our citizenship with God is SECURE.*
- *AND CHURCH, just like it was in ancient Rome, when it comes to our relationship with God- our RIGHTEOUSNESS BEFORE GOD- there are....*

#### **† Two paths to citizenship**

Something we ACHIEVE: **(TRY TO)** Path of performance and bondage- *The path where the pressure is always on.*

- *This is where we think- who I am, my goodness, the wellness of my soul- my rightness with God, is based upon how well I live, how well I perform, how I measure up in contrast to other people.*
- *As a songwriter said- "This path has a ditch on either side, one's call depression one's called pride".*
- *In Matthew 5- sermon on the mount- Jesus is speaking to people who are still under the Mosaic law, and he is prophetically demonstrating how their current thinking of being right with God was, well, impossible.*

**Matthew 5:48** *Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*

- **Do you want your righteousness to be a matter of your effort? No problem, just be perfect.**
- **Today our culture says much the same- you want your identity and well being to be measured by how well you fit in to the expectations of society and those around you? No problem, just be perfect.**
- **This is why Paul's conclusion of the law- performance based acceptance before God- is such a cry of freedom. IT DOESN'T WORK. WE CAN'T DO IT.**

**Romans 3:20** *Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.*

- **All the law does- I ALL the societal, cultural, moral, and familial expectations in the world can do- is make us realize just how much we fail to measure up.**
- **AND THIS IS GOOD NEWS because there is a SECOND PATH. BEHIND DOOR NUMBER TWO THERE IS ANOTHER LIFE... and this Life, this rightness with God and citizenship in God's family is...**

Something we **RECEIVE**: Path of faith and freedom

- **WHAT I WANT TO DO NOW is show you- directly from scripture- just how important – and miraculous- these concepts are..**
- **LOT OF SCRIPTURE- comment very little on it- just listen, and use this a source to go back and contemplate yourself. BECAUSE THIS IS GOOD NEWS.**
- **First- our righteousness- RIGHTNESS- with God is received by FAITH.**

**Romans 1:16-17** *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. <sup>17</sup> For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live (experience God's righteousness, goodness, power of transformation- now) by faith.”*

**Ephesians 2:19-22** *Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, <sup>20</sup> built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. <sup>21</sup> In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. <sup>22</sup> And in him you too are being built together (right now) to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.*

**Philippians 3:20-21** *But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>21</sup> who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.*

- **NEXT- HUGE theme of NT- Our citizenship with God is a matter of new birth. And as children of God the rights, character, and nature of the father- what is true of Christ- is now also true of us.**
- **Through faith in Christ, we were BORN a citizen**

✠ **Born a citizen**

- **In 1 Peter 1, we see a picture of...**

- A new birth, living hope, and eternal inheritance

**1 Peter 1:3-9** *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,<sup>4</sup> and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you,<sup>5</sup> who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.<sup>6</sup> In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.<sup>7</sup> These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.<sup>8</sup> Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy,<sup>9</sup> for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.*

– **Because we were BORN a citizen, we are...**

- Children of God

**John 1:12-13** *Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—<sup>13</sup> children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.*

**1 John 3:1** *See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!*

**Romans 8:14-21** *For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God.<sup>15</sup> The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father."<sup>16</sup> The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.<sup>17</sup> Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.*

<sup>18</sup> *I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.*

<sup>19</sup> *For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed.<sup>20</sup> For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope<sup>21</sup> that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.*

- **Finally, being a citizen of God's kingdom comes with responsibilities- you could say the 'mark' of being a citizen.**
- **Many things come to mind here...**
  - **Fruit of the spirit- God's nature and character increasingly becoming how we think, feel, and act**
  - **Obedience to God's presence, authority, and leadership in all of life.**
  - **And if we look throughout the New Testament, the great and consistent mark of being Christ's disciple- OF BEING BORN OF GOD- you know what I'm going to say... it is how we LOVE.**

- The mark of citizenship

**1 Peter 1:22-23** *Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart.<sup>23</sup> For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.*

**1 John 4:7** *Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.*

**1 John 5:1-5** *Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well. <sup>2</sup> This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. <sup>3</sup> In fact, this is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, <sup>4</sup> for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. <sup>5</sup> Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.*

**1 John 3:23** *And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us.*

- **BY FAITH- right now- this isn't about heaven when we die- but the power and goodness of God in our lives right now... BY FAITH:**
- **We are given the righteousness of God- we are made right with God and with each other**
- **We are CITIZENS of Heaven- God's Kingdom, coming about on earth just as it already is in heaven**
- **We are CITIZENS by BIRTH- New creations BORN OF GOD... as such..**
- **We are CHILDREN OF GOD- and not step children- full children, co-heirs with Christ**
- **We have an inheritance, our union with Christ, God's presence, a new purpose, identity, NOW**
- **This citizenship comes with a RESULT- a MARK- and at its foundation is the great calling to be people defined by the LOVE OF GOD, in how we relate to each other and engage the world around us.**
- **This gets practical very quick. As Citizens of God's Kingdom, Born of God, Children of God- THE LOVE OF GOD is the LENS through which we see, and respond to, the challenges, issues, and complexities of our world- and the very real PEOPLE- who are also loved by God- these issues and complexities represent.**
- **Something to think about. May it be said of us.**