



### Message #51

## “A ROMAN CITIZEN BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN” (Acts 22:22 – 23:11)

### COMMANDS & PROMISES

Have you ever noticed how often commands and promises are linked in Scripture.

For example: **The Great Commission** (Matthew 28:19-20).

#### The Command -

*“Go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you...”*

#### The Promise-

*“...and surely I am with you always, even to the very end of the age”.*

This promise occurs frequently in Scripture....a promise that God will never leave us or forsake us. That He is with His people, no matter what the circumstances or situation. It is a promise for all Christians.

And Paul knew the reality of the promise in his life and ministry. Several times, when Paul was in trouble, the Lord appeared to him and said, “Don’t be afraid. I am with you”.

And in our passage in this study, we see Paul receive that divine encouragement once more.

Paul, once the chief persecutor of the Christians, had become the most persecuted of all Christians.

Under arrest, and in chains, Paul was allowed to address the angry mob of Jews that had been ready to kill him. He took the opportunity (Acts 22:2 – 21, often referred to as Paul’s Defense”) to share his testimony. The Jewish crowd was approving as Paul detailed his background as a zealous Jew, but they totally disapproved when he spoke of his call to take the gospel to the Gentiles. The thought that Gentiles had equal access to God as the Jews stirred them up once again and they called for Paul to be killed (22:22).

The Roman commander, Claudius Lysias, stepped in and, in an effort to prevent another violent riot, rushed Paul into Fort Antonia.

Confused and frustrated over why the Jews had so much hate for Paul, he determined to interrogate Paul for some answers. This interrogation would take the form of a brutal flogging with the Roman scourge/flagellum or flagrum. This was an instrument of torture with bits of metal embedded in the things of the whip. These would open up the prisoner’s flesh and often cause crippling or even death.

Acts 22:25 tells of how Paul was being stretched out in readiness for his flogging (this accentuated the brutality and damage of the flogging)....but the process was interrupted by Paul asking a simple question...

**“Is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen who hasn’t even been found guilty”?**

One of the benefits of Paul being a Roman citizen (from birth) was that he could not be flogged without a trial. Even being arrested and chained was bad enough. Paul’s Roman citizenship gave him special privileges.

**Philippians 3:20** tells us that *“Our citizenship is in heaven...”*.

**Ephesians 2:19** tells us that we *“... are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household...”*

As a believer, you are a citizen of God’s heavenly kingdom.

**What are some of the benefits that we have as “citizens of heaven”?**

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**Look up verses like Romans 6:16; Ephesians 2:1-4; Philippians 3:18-19 to explain the difference between being a citizen of this world and a “citizen of heaven”.**

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Being a citizen comes with benefits....but also commitments. As citizens of heaven, we must conduct ourselves in such a way that we are “good ambassadors” of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. In other words, to live as “Children of the Light” (Ephesians 5:1-20).

Upon finding out that Paul is a Roman citizen, Lysias arranges for an informal meeting of the Sanhedrin (the supreme Jewish court) in order to get to the bottom of this issue. The Sanhedrin assembled and Paul spoke to the Jewish leaders gathered there.

**Look at Paul’s statement in 23:1.**

**Why do you think it enraged Ananias, the High Priest? What was Paul claiming about himself?**

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Paul, in response, insulted the High Priest, accusing him of hypocrisy (23:3) which created a stir amongst the gathered leaders and resulted in an apology from Paul (23:4 – 5).

**Did Paul lose his temper? Was he wrong to do so?**

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**Is it ever okay to get angry? What should we do when it happens?**

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Commentators are not all in agreement about Paul’s response, or the cause of it. Some say it is further proof that his eyesight was very poor and that he didn’t discern who was speaking. Others say that, because it was an informal meeting, the High Priest was not dressed in his robes and was not easily identifiable. Still others say that Paul, as a result of his prolonged absence from Jerusalem, did not know Ananias by sight. Whatever the cause of Paul’s insult, most are in agreement that it was a time when Paul did not abide by his own advice (1 Corinthians 4:12) and that it was not following the example of Jesus (1 Peter 2:23). Maybe we just have to say that it was an occasion when the “flesh” got the better of Paul.

Ananias was High Priest from AD 48-59. He was one of the most cruel and evil men to hold that position. Josephus says he stole money from other priests and bribed Romans and Jews alike. The Talmud ridicules Ananias and he was hated for his brutality and his greed. He was eventually killed by his own countrymen in the Jewish uprising of AD66.

So Paul may well have been right in his estimation of Ananias, but he still spoke hastily and angrily.

The Sadducees	The Pharisees
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Belonged to the privileged minority and had the power of the law on their side.</li><li>• Ruled in the Temple.</li><li>• Recognized the authority of the five books of Moses only.</li><li>• Did not believe in the resurrection. (Acts 23:8 as well as in Matthew, Mark, and Luke.)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Represented the working-class and had the power of the people on their side.</li><li>• Ruled in the synagogues.</li><li>• Recognized all the writings of the Old Testament, plus oral tradition.</li><li>• Believed in the resurrection.</li></ul>

#### **Acts 23:6-10**

Commentators are also divided over what Paul does next....highlighting the divisions between the Pharisees and Sadducees over the issue of resurrection. Some see it as a shoddy trick to cause confusion, others see it as a necessary explanation of a central part of Paul’s belief and life....

He had been confronted by the risen Christ on the road to Damascus.

It was the Living Lord he was serving. It was by His resurrection that Jesus was proven to be the Son of God (Rom. 1:4).

**In what ways are you like and unlike Paul in your response when you are falsely accused?**

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After the meeting of the Sanhedrin developed into a violent rabble, Lysias again took Paul back into the fort to protect him. There, in prison, the Lord encourages him with a reminder and an assurance. The reminder was that He was with Paul. The assurance was that he would not be killed and that he would get to Rome to testify.

**Put yourself in Paul’s position. What would this word from the Lord mean to you?**

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**How can you live more fully in the reality of the Lord’s presence with you....at all times?**