

“PAUL AND THE ROMAN TRIBUNE.”

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First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA

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Texts for the Sermon: Acts 22:22-29

Introduction.

From the previous text we remember Paul was arrested in the Temple on false charges and was about to be stoned to death when the Roman Tribune intervened and arrested and bound him. He permitted Paul to address the angry mob of Jews.

In Paul's sermon he recounted how Jesus Christ had sovereignly interrupted his plans to kill Christians and turned him around into a Christ follower. He showed how God had revealed Himself to Paul in visions and through miracles, that what Paul was doing, was not Paul's doing at all, but God's calling to take the Gospel to the Gentiles.

Paul had bent over backwards to give deference to the Jews, speaking respectfully, not upsetting any of their traditions and customs, honoring the Temple practices.

Paul's Conflict with the Jews, 22:22-23.

The last verse of his speech was:

Acts 22:21 And God said to me, 'Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles.'

Acts 22:22 Up to this word they listened to him. Then they raised their voices and said, "Away with such a fellow from the earth! For he should not be allowed to live."

Up to this word they were quietly, respectfully listening, but when Paul used the G word, they lost it, freaked out, went ballistic. The crowd was not moved or convinced by Paul's words, except by the word Gentile, which moved them to kill him.

For these Jews the word Gentile was a trigger word. The Gentile word exposed their sin of racism and hate, and specifically the sin of unbelief in God's will and ways, that God would and even could include other peoples. This was utter heresy and blasphemy to them.

It was beyond the realm of possibility that God would ever stoop so low as to send a Jew to bring the hope of salvation and eternal life to the likes of Gentiles. So the riot starts up again.

Paul Examined by flogging from the Romans, 22:24-25.

“Examined by flogging, to find out why they were shouting against him like this.”

Examined by flogging. That sounds like “The beatings will continue until the moral improves.”

They are going to torture Paul in order to beat a confession out of him.

Of course this is unjust. Paul is being asked to accuse himself, an innocent man. If they wanted to know the charges they should have brought in some of the Jews. The tribune must presume some level of guilt, since so great a crowd can't be all wrong. Rather than do what is right and fair, he does what is advantageous, politically correct. Such is the nature of politics.

A free Roman citizen could not be punished without a fair trial, where charges were heard, and he was proven guilty. Roman citizens were accorded great freedoms and privileges, denied to others. It was a crime to bind or beat an uncondemned Roman citizen.

Paul Plays Politics with his Roman Citizenship, 22:26-29.

Paul was a citizen by birth, either because the city of Tarsus was declared by Rome to be a free city and the citizens of Tarsus given the privileges of Roman citizenship, or because his father was a Roman citizen, perhaps by virtue of having fought in a civil war on behalf of Rome, or as a reward for some great service to the empire.

Or there was the path the Tribune had taken which was to buy his citizenship at great expense. Some say there was not a way legally to buy citizenship, if so this was done under the table by way of a bribe.

In any case, the tribune was afraid, though Paul had not been beaten, he had been bound to be beaten, and this could jeopardize his military career.

Conclusion and application.

From this summary of our text let's consider three applications.

Trigger words.

For these Jews the word Gentile was a trigger word. Have you heard of trigger words or trigger warnings in our social discourse?

Trigger words are words that evoke a strong emotional or psychological reaction, words that may have a strong connection to

some past event or trauma. We hear about trigger warnings being put of certain books in universities and libraries.

Remember the elementary school playground taunt, “Sticks and stones may break my bones but words can never hurt me.” Well it would appear those days are gone.

We live in an increasingly emotionally vulnerable and fragile culture, where people think words and ideas can cause them harm, or they chose to let them.

The assumption is coming into contact with certain words or ideas may disturb us or challenge our outlook on life and damage to our emotional health. Trigger warnings are meant to keep one safe from emotional discomfort by avoiding any negative experiences and be insulating one from the harsher realities of life.

This is an impossible system to uphold, you can't live in a bubble. And you have the impossibility of who gets to define what is a trigger word. What will we do when God, Jesus, sin, become trigger words that hurt people's ears and can't be spoken?

If there has ever been a book that is designed to make us uncomfortable and challenge our way of thinking, it's the Bible.

Here is the problem in a nutshell. The whole idea of trigger words and trigger warnings has made us into victims. This allows us to shift responsibility for our responses outside of us to some external person, idea or word. The trigger is the cause.

That's the lie. Triggers do not cause their response. I can't make you angry, you chose to be angry. Anger is a chosen response, you

have other options. This is important to remember in all our disagreements as husbands and wives, parents and children, neighbors and friends.

Another word for triggers is buttons, who or what pushes our buttons. No one pushes our buttons, we make that choice to let them or not.

Furthermore, triggers move us away from a God-oriented, Biblical way of responding to the harsh realities of the brokenness in the world around us.

Prov. 29:22 A man of wrath stirs up strife, and one given to anger causes much transgression.

Prov. 19:11 Good sense makes one slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offense.

Prov. 29:11 A fool gives full vent to his spirit, but a wise man quietly holds it back.

In our previous church we had a black family who had a high school son who was frequently the target of racist comments. His father would repeatedly remind him those comments were not about him but about the others, and to not be triggered to react.

Maturity is learning to take responsibility for our own actions and reactions and Christian maturity is learning to exercise the fruit of the Holy Spirit, especially of self-control. Out-of-control emotions tend not to produce God-honoring results. When we are full of ourselves we end up in anger, when we are full of the Holy Spirit, we end up in love, joy and peace.

Painful words, ideas, experiences in life are a reminder to exercise repentance and forgiveness, a gentle answer turns away wrath. We have the example of Jesus' silence in the face of all kinds of other emotional responses to trigger words and taunts.

Don't live life as a victim, you have the Holy Spirit. Don't take up offenses, don't take someone else's bait, let love cover a multitude of sins. Follow the example of Paul's humble, calm confidence in God, and in the reasonableness of God's truth.

Politics

In light of Paul's appeal to Roman law, we should give thanks for laws, laws that protect us, laws that ensure some measure of justice, laws that preserve order, laws that govern sinful people and sinful behavior, laws that keep in check to some measure wicked, evil, illegal behavior.

And where we see the law being flaunted or broken, can we acknowledge that is still the exception, and that generally we are helped by laws? While not perfect or perfectly applied our legal system is a great blessing to us and the envy of billions who suffer great injustice.

This is an encouragement to parents to instill discipline in their homes, to teach obedience in the home so when children are unleashed out into the world, they are generally law-abiding citizens.

And along with giving thanks to God from the blessings and benefits we enjoy only by His grace, we can also notice how Paul uses his rights and privileges. Sometimes he speaks up, sometimes he is silent.

Why does Paul speak up here when he didn't in Acts 16? Why does Paul stop this flogging when he had said he was not afraid to go to Jerusalem and if necessary die for the sake of the Gospel?

Paul didn't do this just to save his own neck, he did it for the sake of the Gospel, he was willing to die but his work wasn't done yet.

Paul was no coward, but he was no masochist either. In Philippi Paul's flogging and imprisonment led to the conversion of the Philippian jailer and his family and the building up of the church there. In Jerusalem Paul was led by the Holy Spirit to seize the opportunity to appeal to Rome in order to take the Gospel all the way to Rome.

We have a system of laws and justice and freedom that are ours to use, as any citizen. We are free to use our legal rights, but we should use them not just for personal advantage, but for the sake of God's glory and the Gospel and honoring Christ.

Paul is not interested in defending himself, he is most interested in defending the Gospel, the honor and glory of his Savior, Jesus Christ. Paul was not afraid of death. He loved Jesus more than He loved life.

We often think of our government and our political system as for our benefit, what can it do for us. We tend to have a selfish, self-serving perspective. Laws and leaders belong to God, they are His instruments for His glory to advance His purposes. Whether good or bad, just or unjust, leaders and laws are under His sovereign control. A pagan Roman doing something unjust was God's tool for taking the Gospel to Rome.

Let us use the political means the Lord gives to us for the furtherance of the gospel. Let us look for opportunities to use the law of the land as an aid to spread the gospel. Let us not take for granted the privilege to gather for worship, to preach and share the Gospel.

Citizenship

We just celebrated the Fourth of July. Most of us gathered with friends or family, we ate and drank together, maybe did some fireworks. It is a generally fun and festive day, no matter what side of the aisle you are on or what you think of the future of American politics. It is a day American's are proud to be an American.

Our opportunities, liberties, freedoms, rights and riches are the envy of most of the world. All over the world, American citizenship is still considered a huge benefit. Your American passport is coveted by most, and worth more than any other passport on the black market. Our country is still one many people try to get into and not out of.

We should thank God for His grace to us in our earthly citizenship in this country. It isn't deserved, it is a gift, not to be taken for granted.

But we have something better than Roman citizenship, something better than American citizenship. Christians have citizenship in a better country, in heaven. It gives us far greater rights and privileges. What we have here is nothing compared to what we have there.

Philippians 3:18-20 For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of

Christ. 19 Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. 20 But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Don't set your minds on just earthly things, set them on heaven. Notice Paul's calmness, his freedom from fear and anxiety, as he makes his claim on Roman citizenship. He knows what it gains him, he has nothing to fear.

How much more does our claim on heavenly citizenship calm and quiet our hearts from all fears, from all stress and anxiety about the future. If God is our Father and heaven is our eternal home, what do we have to fear, whom do we have to fear?

Our citizenship here is a privilege and a blessing for which we can give thanks to God, but remember it is temporary. We will not be singing the Star-Spangled Banner or America the Beautiful in heaven. We will be singing All Hail the Power of Jesus Name and Crown Him With Many Crowns.

Revelation 7:9-10 I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, 10 and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"

How can we be used of God to build a kingdom made up of people from every tribe, tongue, language and people? How can we like Paul use our temporal, earthly blessings to be a blessing to others?

Have you thought about how you can use your American citizenship for the glory of God and the spreading of the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

Our mission is not to make America great, but to make heaven glorious. Instill in your children and grandchildren that America is not the greatest place in the world, heaven is. Don't look to or trust in what can be lost or taken away. Trust in what is absolutely secure, our *unshakable kingdom*. Our citizenship gives us unshakable confidence in God's unbreakable promises.

Because of our heavenly citizenship, we are free from fear in the face of all the powers of this world. We are completely safe from the violence of the most evil people, we are independent from the unjust judgments of the courts of the world. God is our security and just judge.

We are resident aliens here, strangers and aliens as Paul says. Our passport is blood red, and our entrance visa is stamped with an irrevocable stamp. Because of faith in Jesus Christ, God is not ashamed to call us His children and He has prepared a place for us far better than any place, any country of earth. Live as free people regardless of what earthly freedoms we may have or lose, regardless of what our light and momentary sufferings might be. The glory to come far outweighs them all.

Prayer: We ask that you would help us to use every means and opportunity in ways that will direct people to you and the salvation that you bring through Jesus Christ alone. For it is in His Name we pray, Amen.