

## Born Free

Harmony M.B.C., June 30, 2013

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**Act 22:24** The chief captain commanded him to be brought into the castle, and bade that he should be examined by scourging; that he might know wherefore they cried so against him.

**Act 22:25** And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said unto the centurion that stood by, Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned?

**Act 22:26** When the centurion heard *that*, he went and told the chief captain, saying, Take heed what thou doest: for this man is a Roman.

**Act 22:27** Then the chief captain came, and said unto him, Tell me, art thou a Roman? He said, Yea.

**Act 22:28** And the chief captain answered, With a great sum obtained I this freedom. And Paul said, But I was *free* born.

**Act 22:29** Then straightway they departed from him which should have examined him: and the chief captain also was afraid, after he knew that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him.

In the days of Paul, some people, countries, and cities that were under Roman rule were what we might call “servant or slave countries or cities.” That is, they did not have the rights of citizenship that actual Roman citizens had. Some scholars think that Paul was a Roman citizen because the Roman government (under Augustus Caesar) had made Tarsus, Paul’s native town, a free city. So, Paul’s family being of Tarsus, were Roman citizens.

Despite a history of brutal and warlike political and social policies and activities, the Roman Empire was noted for its law and order...based on the laws of the empire. Everybody under Roman rule had to obey certain laws of the emperor, and there were law enforcers throughout the kingdom to make sure laws were kept. In this case in our text, Roman soldiers kept the law, although there was local government which was actually run by the Jewish rulers of the day...the Sanhedrin. However, the local Jewish government did not have all governing authority, and issues that affected public peace, when it became a kind of mob riot, was handled by the Roman chief captain (colonel) who was in charge of the military at that place.

This is the stage we find Paul on. The Jews have accused him of polluting the synagogue, and of causing insurrection. So, the Roman soldiers step in. When they do, as they begin to follow the process to get to the bottom of the big uproar, they are suddenly confronted with the problem that Paul, whom they intended to whip and question, was a Roman citizen. It is from this incident that we want to bring our message today.

We are on the eve of celebrating our Independence Day...sometimes we call it 4<sup>th</sup> of July, but we should begin to make it a habit of calling it Independence Day. Continuing to remind Americans that we are the free people that we are today because we resisted tyranny is a critical need as our nation slides into totalitarianism, and our freedoms are snatched from us one by one. Somewhere down the road, the American people are going to come to a crossroads about our liberties. We will have to make a choice between resisting this looming threat of becoming a slave nation by standing for our constitutional freedoms and perhaps re-enacting another Revolutionary War, or of bowing down to the sinister intent of men who would love nothing more than to throw the Constitution in the trash can and rule over us as tyrants.

As we think about this, I want us to look at this encounter between Paul and the Roman soldiers. I want us to notice some facts about the rights of free men and the infringement that can occur by the government that rules over them. I hope our message today will inspire and empower every one of you to get serious about calling down the power of God to intervene for us for the freedoms this country has enjoyed for more than 200 years.

I. **Acts 22:24** The chief captain commanded him to be brought into the castle, and bade that he should be examined by scourging; that he might know wherefore they cried so against him.

- Remember that at this point, Paul was just a Roman subject without Roman citizenship to this Roman colonel.
- In a nation of law and order, there is procedure which is followed if those in power are obeying the laws. It is not one rule for one person and another rule for another person.
- Scourging was the process used by permission from the Emperor to get the truth out of anybody arrested who was not a Roman citizen and from whom the authorities needed information (do you remember that they scourged Jesus as part of his trial?).
- In a nation of law and order, a citizen occupying a position of high authority or responsibility should have to pay the same penalty as a poor man on the street if punishment is due.
- It is arbitrary and situational exercise of authority that robs free people of justice and fairness.

II. **Acts 22:25** And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said unto the centurion that stood by, Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned?

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- **V.25** - A free people challenge government when due process is violated or when discrimination and preference are practiced that the law does not define and sanction.
  - ▶ See also **Acts 16:16-38** especially **v. 37** - the point here made by scripture is that Paul intended that the very authorities who took away this evangelistic troop's liberty be the very ones who answered publicly for it.
- Free people should question when those in authority do business as though above the law, or when they break the law
- **vv. 26-27** - Law enforcement and government is cautious about personal liberties of free people when they have a law abiding spirit themselves
- However, a sure indicator that a nations leaders despise the law of the land, and therefore despise the freedoms of its people, is when they begin trying to infringe upon the rights which its people have under the law.
  - ▶ Notice how Jesus questioned the lawless acts of that Jewish mob in Gethsemane: **Mat. 26:47-55**
- Free people stand up for their rights
  - ▶ "Those who would give up essential liberty to purchase a little temporary safety deserve neither liberty nor safety." Benjamin Franklin
  - ▶ "And what country can preserve its liberties, if its rulers are not warned from time to time, that this people preserve the spirit of resistance?" Thomas Jefferson
- The rights and liberties of free people is based on the law of the land, not the whims of those in

authority

▶ America the Beautiful has this phrase in one of the stanzas: “Confirm thy soul in self control, Thy liberty in law” (“Confirm your liberty in law...how profound...make sure the law protects your people’s liberty).

- The Constitution is the supreme law of the land, but this revealing statement by John Adams, second President of the U.S. explains the only way the Constitution will function as the law of the land: "Our constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other."

III. Close by reviewing the most well known statement of the Declaration of Independence:

- “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are **endowed by their Creator** with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”
- One bible verse sums this up: **Acts 17:25** Neither is (God) worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he **giveth to all life, and breath, and all things**;
  - ▶ Life as a God-given right: **Acts 17:28** For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring.
  - ▶ Liberty (freedom from captivity, and the right to choose) as a God-given right: **Gal. 5:1** “Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free...”
  - ▶ **2Cor. 3:17** Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord *is*, there *is* liberty.
  - ▶ Pursuit of happiness as a God-given right: Note first that it is not happiness that is an unalienable God-given right, but the pursuit of happiness: **Psalms 146:5** Happy *is he* that *hath* the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope *is* in the LORD his God:
    - Here is the pursuit of happiness: **Psalms 1:1** Blessed (this is the same Hebrew word translated as “happy”) *is* the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.