Paul's Roman Citizenship

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Date: 19 October 2025

Preacher: Kent Dixon

[0:00] Hi there, this is Pastor Kent. Just to let you know, we had some technical difficulties this past Sunday, so some of the audio in this recorded sermon isn't amazing, but we thought it would be better to have it than not at all.

So, please bear with us, and I hope you enjoy and it speaks to you. God bless. Welcome here for this Sunday, October 19th, 2025. My name is Kent Dixon, and it's my joy to be the pastor here.
So, I purposely focused on the date because I wanted to get it right, because Brock and I, I was editing the sermon from last Sunday, getting ready to upload it. Brock went to put it on the phone line, and he said, you said the wrong date. And I said, rats!
So, I'm very type A, so I'm going to fix it. I re-recorded just that piece this morning. And it's just, to me, it's important. So, when people are listening to sermons from the past, they know roughly when it landed.
And they, you know, whether it's on the podcast or the website, they have a sense of the timeline of things. And so, I think that's important. At least it is for me. So, this morning, we're continuing in our ongoing sermon series, Acts to All the World, and you can see that on the slide.
[1:11] And we're continuing to dig into the history of the early church together, to see what we can learn from these people, these places, these events that we explore and read about together.

Larry said to me this morning, he's beginning to grieve the ending of this series. And I said to him, fear not, there's a few more weeks yet. Some people go, ah, a few more weeks? I thought it was almost over.
I was looking at next week's sermon, starting to think about that a little bit. And I think it's 50 or 51 weeks.
And that's not quite at the end yet. So, we'll be at about 54 sermons in this series when we're done. And I am still alive, and so are you. So, Michelle encouraged me to say this a bit this morning, because I was not ranting on the way to church, but I was just kind of espousing some things that are important to me.
And I'm glad you're here this morning, because this is what it's about. Church is not, I talked to another pastor at an event I attended yesterday, and he and I were grieving, mourning, complaining, whatever it was.
[2:26] But I said to him, church is not a solo journey. And it was like he had an epiphany, and he said, you're right, it's not. And I said, when you don't come to church, you've heard me say this before, when you don't come to church, and this is not meant to be a guilt trip, you're missing out.

You're missing out on this. You're missing out on singing together. You're missing out on the opportunity, the amazing opportunity that we have to declare and proclaim and worship the living God.
To worship Jesus Christ, who is the author and defender of our faith. Those things are important. But even more than that, and I said to this pastor, as he didn't realize he was going to get a sermon on Sunday afternoon, I said to him, when you come to church, you're sharing your gifts and skills and abilities and personality and love and care and your unique connection with God with everyone else.
And vice versa. Right? When you stay home and listen online, no offense to online church, it's not the same. It is not the same.
You heard me talk a couple weeks ago about social media being neither social nor media. And I hear my dad laughing when I say that. Because that's what he would have felt about it.
[3:48] That's what he did feel about it. So when we tune into things or listen to things, I'm not saying other sources aren't helpful, but they need to be supplementary.

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This is what it's all about. Rant over. Rant over. So when we last left Paul, the Roman commander and the mob two weeks ago, Paul had been giving his defense to the mob.
Now, last week we had a Thanksgiving sermon. So I'm asking you to reach back in your brain. Do you remember that? That Paul had been giving his defense to the mob. So he talked about his early life.
He talked about his background. And he also, possibly most importantly, talked about his personal conversion story. And during his defense, maybe you remember this too, there was a point at which the mob was done.
Do you remember that? They had been patient. They had even been slightly respectful as Paul shared all of these things. But there was a point at which they had heard and had enough.
[4:51] So we pick up that story this morning, right after Paul is given his defense. And our passage this morning is Acts 22, verses 22 to 30. Bless you.

Acts 22, verses 22 to 30. You can see it on the screen there. So open your Bible to that passage or grab a Bible from the pew in front of you, or I will read it for us as well.
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. As they were shouting and throwing off their cloaks and flinging dust into the air, 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. 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?
When the centurion heard this, he went to the commander and reported it. What are you going to do? He asked. This man is a Roman citizen. The commander went to Paul and asked, Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?
[6:00] Yes, I am, he answered. Then the commander said, I had to pay a lot of money for my citizenship, but I was born a citizen, Paul replied. 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. The commander wanted to find out exactly why Paul was being accused by the Jews.
So the next day he released him and ordered the chief priests and all the members of the Sanhedrin to assemble. Then he brought Paul and had him stand before them. Our sermon this morning is titled, Paul's Roman Citizenship.
And I want to focus for a moment on some important reminders about our identity as Christians. So I hope that's okay. It's important for us to always be reminded that as Christians, we actually enjoy a unique dual citizenship.
In Philippians 3 verses 20 and 21, Paul reminds us that our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a savior from there, says Paul, the Lord Jesus Christ, 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.
[7:17] So we're not ultimately citizens of Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, or even this world. We're ultimately citizens of heaven, as Paul says.

And this world is just our temporary residence. Our citizenship, friends, is in heaven. Ephesians chapter 2 is a really powerful message overall of our identity in Christ.
So if you want some encouragement ever in your day, read Ephesians chapter 2. Let's review some highlights. Ephesians chapter 2 verses 4 and 5 says, But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ.
Even when we were dead in transgressions, it is by grace you have been saved. Our redemption and salvation are thanks to God's grace, his deep, deep love for every one of us.
Ephesians 2 verse 10 says, For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do God's good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.
[8:34] Not only does God love us, He created us with care, with intentionality. We have a purpose that God created us for before we even existed, before we were created.

Ephesians 2 verse 13 says, But now, in Christ Jesus, you who were once far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.
It's ultimately thanks to Jesus and His sacrifice that we can receive God's grace and forgiveness. It's only through Jesus. The only way.

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And through that relationship, through Jesus making that way, He brought us the opportunity to be in close relationship with His Father and ours. Ephesians 2 verse 19 and 20 says, Because of the relationship that we have with God then, thanks to what Jesus has done for us, we are welcomed into God's family.
We are brothers and sisters. And our citizenship is in heaven. So then with our primary citizenship being in heaven, we're essentially pilgrims, is the message we get in Scripture often.
[10:18] Temporary residents. Travelers. I like that perspective. But, hear this, because we see this in the Christian world all too often, there's a risk here of adopting the perspective that we shouldn't care too much about this world.

You heard that? We shouldn't get too involved in this world. Friends, I believe that is a flawed perspective.
I don't believe that is how we are called to live as followers of Christ. I don't believe that. But we're not going to go into that too deeply today, because that's a whole other conversation.
But we'll get a sense of it. Not caring about this world and this life is ultimately flawed, because we are also citizens of this world, this country, this province, this city.
We are earthly citizens too. So we really do enjoy that special, unique situation of dual citizenship.
[11:43] So this, I hope, gives us a bit of a refresher on our citizenship. What about Paul's? Let's consider some things about that.

Paul's Roman citizenship. Well, first, we're going to consider that his life was threatened. So Acts 22, verses 1 and 2, at the beginning of Paul's defense before this crowd, he begins by saying, maybe you remember this, brothers and fathers, listen now to my defense.
Remember, he starts with, as always Paul tends to do, starts with respect and recognition. And he's polite, right? He's polite and he's calm.
And so when the crowd heard him, particularly speaking to them in Aramaic, their native language for most of them, they became quiet, right? They might have even started to think, wait a minute, he's either one of us or there's a connection here and this is worth our time.
So they settled down. So Paul speaks to the crowd in Aramaic. That would have let him know, as I said, he was one of them. He shared their culture.
[12:57] Potentially, he shared some of their beliefs and obviously their language. So when Paul defended himself before the mob in Jerusalem, they listened to him quietly until, remember, we talked about they had had enough.

As part of his defense, Paul mentions that he had been sent to the Gentiles. Good idea? Bad idea.
So Acts 22, verse 22, says the crowd listened to Paul until he said this.
That was the turning point, his Gentile comment. Then they raised their voices and shouted, rid the earth of him. He's not fit to live. Right away, gasoline on a fire.
So the crowd was respectful and quiet, we talked about, until they weren't. Right? And it's not like they suddenly, gradually got irritated. They lit up like crazy.
They immediately called for Paul to be put to death. Would take quite a lot to go from having a decent, respectful conversation, I'm willing to listen to you, to all of a sudden, I want you dead.
[14:06] That's a pretty extreme jump. Right? So as the crowd was getting worked up again, we read that the Roman commander was determined to know the truth. I think he has the right motives there.

He ordered Paul back into the barracks. Again, we've talked about before, probably partly for his own protection, but in this case, he wanted him to be flogged and questioned again.
So at that time, perhaps you know, you can get a general sense of what flogging is about or what it means. At that time, it was a form of torture that involved someone being beaten with leather straps that often had rough pieces of bone or metal woven into them.
So just as the soldiers are about to flog him, right, we know what flogging is, he asked this really important and strategic question. So, as I was reading the passage again this morning, it hit in my mind, I don't know if anybody knows the movie The Princess Bride, but there's a torture scene in The Princess Bride, which is quite comical and, you know, it's pretty lighthearted.
So this almost reminded me of that. Paul is essentially attached to a rack and they're winding up to flog him and the flogging could lead to death quite easily.
[15:25] But we read that Paul's like, wait a second, I just have one more question. Right? Who has the presence of mind in the midst of about to be tortured to do this?

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The Apostle Paul seems to. So in Acts 22, verse 25, we read that Paul turns to the centurion standing next to him and asks, hey, I'm just wondering, is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen who hasn't even been found guilty?
FYI, a little context. So I wonder what went through the centurion's mind at that point. Right? Possibly the word yikes.
I don't know if Roman centurions use the word yikes, but, right? Like the sound of a needle on a record scratching. Right? He's about to do something and then, whoa, uh-oh.
So, I wonder too, this centurion that Paul speaks to, had he been near the crowd, had he heard Paul's defense as he spoke in Aramaic?
[16:29] So why did they not think about some of these important identity pieces for Paul? Had the Romans all assumed that, so far, that Paul was a Jewish citizen?

Right? That there was nothing more to him than he was a Jew speaking to other Jews in Aramaic? Possibly? So then, we read that the centurion, Mr. Yikes, went to his commander and asked what they should do with Paul now.
Right? Okay, we've got him on the rack and we're about to flog him. It seems like we can't. What do we do? So, especially knowing that Paul had just declared himself to be a Roman citizen or certainly strongly implied it, right?
What do they do? So, the situation and actions that seemed to be fairly cut and dried when they thought that Paul was a Jewish citizen had just instantly become more complicated and potentially significantly more risky.
So, the centurion's cautious approach should also remind us of how things went when Paul and Silas were thrown in jail in Philippi. Paul was clear that even though he and Silas were Roman citizens, they had been thrown in jail without a proper trial, right?
[17:50] I love how Paul is very quick to say these are the rules, you're not following the rules, just FYI. So, we learn that at that time as well that when the guards discovered Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, they panicked, right?

They were alarmed. Paul clearly knew Roman law and recognized the importance of his Roman citizenship as he preached to the Gentiles, right? important there as a means of both protection from Roman authorities and also credibility with his Roman audiences, right?
They also could relate to him as a fellow citizen. So, next we learn that the Roman commander questioned Paul about his Roman citizenship, right?
So, one of my guys came and told me this, is this accurate? So, the commander asked Paul outright if he's a Roman citizen and Paul says, yep. So, it's interesting then how the commander responds.
First, I don't know if you noticed this, but he says that he purchased his citizenship, the commander. And then, it also, it doesn't sound like, oh, you got it free, I had to pay for it, bummer.
[19:02] it's more of a sense that he equates its value and the price he paid with, you know, its value and the monetary price, right? That's what he sees the value of citizenship being.

But Paul, right away, states that he was born a citizen, a citizen, sorry. So, you may remember that birthright citizenship really seems to have come through his grandmother and his mother, through his mother's side.
So, we definitely get the impression that no matter how much money someone might pay to buy their Roman citizenship, citizenship by birth clearly had a very different value and status.
So, it's interesting how quickly things change there, right? The response to Paul's claim of Roman citizenship is instantaneous, it's immediate. But as an aside though, I find it interesting that the Roman soldiers were quick to grab Paul and throw him in jail when the mob was after him, even without evidence, really, or a trial, we know that.
But then his claim of citizenship was accepted without question and taken very seriously. See the contrast there? So, there's really no evidence of Paul being, you know, he didn't pull out his Roman birth certificate or scroll or whatever it would have been.
[20:26] But they don't question it, right? As soon as Paul says, I am a Roman citizen by birth, they panic. They have blown it and they know that. So then we learn that the soldiers that were about to flog and interrogate Paul, they withdrew immediately, scripture tells us.

And then that the Roman commander was alarmed that he had put a Roman citizen in chains and thrown him in jail. But it's interesting though, because the commander was still determined to find

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out what the Jews had accused Paul of, Roman citizen or not.
So it's almost like a retroactive trial, retroactive evidence. So remember the commander here would have been in charge of the Roman troops who were stationed at the Antonia Fortress.
Remember I was talking about that a few weeks ago. So this was a Roman fortress located near the temple. And Paul actually gave his defense, as I did a bit more digging, he gave his defense to the mob from the steps of that Roman fortress.
So he's standing, literally standing outside the prison, what's going to be his temporary home, giving his defense to the mob. Then the Roman commander would have had really close connections with Jewish religious leaders.
[21:50] Because of their proximity to the temple, because their primary role, as we've talked about in the past, was to defend the temple and protect it, he and his soldiers, being responsible for the temple, would have had a connection to the Jewish leadership.

So because of that connection to Jewish religious establishment, the Sanhedrin, the Jewish high court, the supreme Sanhedrin, of course, was the supreme judicial and legislative body of the ancient Jewish people.
The Roman commander was able to call, and our passage actually says order, which I found interesting, he's able to call a meeting of the chief priests, that's pretty influential, call all the Sanhedrin together, the Jewish council, to bring Paul before them.
That's no small thing, to have that power, to be able to call this elite group together. So it's interesting to me that while Paul's Roman citizenship had caught the attention of the Roman commander and soldiers, it's a Jewish body that the commander wants to bring Paul in front of.
Interesting, right? So in some ways, this reminds me of Pontius Pilate's reluctance to try Jesus. Even though the Jewish leaders, there's a parallel here, insisted that he try him.
[23:21] We get a sense then that the Romans really didn't want to get involved in conflicts or issues they determined to be Jewish problems. And yet, here we are.

So we can see from our passage this morning that Paul certainly used his Roman citizenship to his advantage. And we've also recognized that before in other places. We may not be able to relate to what it meant to be Roman citizens.
I don't think any of us can. But it's important for us to recognize that we have duties as citizens of the earth. I want to take a moment to consider what our duties and responsibilities are.
Remember our dual citizenship. citizenship. So what our duties and responsibilities are in particular to persons who are in authority over us.
First, we have a duty to obey. Hard for you to hear that. To obey people in power and authority over us.
[24:32] Paul is clear of many things in Romans 13 verses 1 to 5. We are subject to earthly governing authorities. Because their power is given to them by God.

And I feel that's a slippery slope as well. Because does God give, are all the actions of every political leader godly and from God?
No. I would argue no. God allows their power. God allows them to be in positions of authority over us.
So we really do need to seek to do what is right through that and obey those in authority. And those things aren't always synonymous.
If we obey those in authority, we won't have any issues. now you're saying, wait a minute, let's hold up. Because in what I'm getting at there is it is when we rebel, when we put ourselves at risk, potentially.
[25:45] Well, what about the rebellion we saw yesterday? Well, that's a different story. Peter says in 1 Peter 2, 13 and 14, submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority.

whether to the emperor as the supreme authority or to governors who are sent to him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. Maybe you remember in Acts 5, 27 to 29, we learned that the apostles are brought before the Sanhedrin.
Remember that? Passage says the apostles were brought in and made to appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest. Peter and the other apostles replied, hear this, my friends, we must obey God rather than human beings.
So whenever there's a conflict between an earthly directive and a clear directive of our faith, our clear directive of God's power over us, God's desire for us to serve him and follow his will, we must

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obey God's authority and not human authority.
So maybe that suggestion that we're supposed to obey government and authority is a tough concept for you. Especially when the actions and motives of those in power seem to be, at times, contrary to what we may see as being God honoring.
[27:30] So we're not new to that debate, if that's an encouragement to you. That debate has gone on among Christians for centuries and it continues to this day.

ready? Are there ever times we should not submit to the government? Well, the reality is that we should never allow the government to force us to disobey God.
That should always be our guideline, our number one red flag. If we are being forced to deny God, to disobey God, that is a red flag.
Jesus and his apostles always followed, maybe you noticed, always followed governing authorities, unless they needed to demonstrate this allegiance to God's higher authority.
We see that, right? God's allegiance to God over government, sadly, always came with consequences, often came at a very high price.
[28:46] We also need to be prepared to face consequences ourselves if God ever compels us to defy governing authorities. make sure you don't do that out of your own desire, but submit to God and make sure that's what he's asking you to do.

Second, we have a duty to pay. So, recognizing that we have a duty to pay authorities, Paul says in Romans 13, verses 6 and 7, this is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants who give their full time to governing.
Full time? Sometimes. Give to everyone what you owe them. Hear that message. If you owe taxes, pay taxes. If revenue, then revenue.
If respect, then respect. If honor, then honor. Friends, we have a duty to pay particularly our financial obligations like taxes.
1 Peter 2 17 says, show proper respect to everyone. Love the family of believers, fear God, and honor the emperor.
[30:00] It's another thing we have a duty to pay. We have a duty to pay respect to those in authority over us. Third, is us to pray.

1 Timothy 2 verses 1 and 2 reminds us, I urge then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession, and thanksgiving be made for all people, for kings and those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.
Paul reminds us there that we are to pray for all people. You heard me this morning praying for our leaders in government. We need to pray for the people in authority over us.
We want them to experience the presence of God. We want them to be directed by the Holy Spirit. If they don't have a relationship with God, we want that for them as much as anyone else.
Christians who sincerely pray for their leaders are actually serving their country in really powerful ways.
[31:37] Maybe you've thought about that and maybe you haven't. What about having the right heart as we approach all of these things? 1 Peter 3.12 gives us a powerful reminder that the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous.

His ears are attentive to their prayer. That the face of the Lord is against those who do evil. What does that mean? it's critical that our prayers are humble and sincere, submitted to God's will and not self-serving in any way.
It's important for us also to be asking God always to reveal sinful motives in us. Guess what? We're human beings. But to reveal that God would reveal sinful motives that would cause him to turn away from our prayers.
It's also important, I think, that we must continue to pray for God's influence and his will to be in the hearts and minds and actions of our leaders. Even when circumstances in our world may seem hopeless, God is still in control and our prayers do not fall on deaf ears.
I attended a seminar yesterday on Christian nationalism. And I didn't say it, but there was one point when there was a question period and people were asking, a lot of hand-wringing, and what do we do?
[33:17] How do we know if it's happening? Could it be coming into Canada from the U.S.? And I thought in my head, this is going to maybe sound obvious. I didn't say it again, which maybe I should have.

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I was going to say, folks, are we not all on the same page that God is still in control here? Are we not all in agreement that he's not asking us to worry?
He's not asking us to sit by and do nothing, but he's not asking us to fix this or to be worried or fearful or anxious.
I thought maybe it would have sounded too pastorly. It was one of only a couple pastors in the group. It seemed obvious.
So just to summarize, as Christians living in the world, we have an earthly citizenship, no question. As citizens of a place, a nation, where our citizenship has been granted to us either by birth or other means, we need to carefully fulfill our God-given purpose and duties as citizens.
[34:38] And as Paul did, we always need to seek to use our rights as citizens, especially when they serve God's purposes. We live in a country where we can speak freely about our faith.

Let's do that. But as Christians, we also live in a world where we have a heavenly citizenship. That calls us to be prayerful as we seek to intercede with God for all people.
This calls us to be peacemakers as we serve the prince of peace. It also cautions us to prioritize our heavenly citizenship over our earthly citizenship.
nation. In the end, like Paul, we also have a dual citizenship. Friends, ask God to help you see that clearly so that you can be a blessing to both God and your community and your country.
Amen.

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