

***GODLY CITIZENS***  
**Acts 21:37-39; 22:1-3**

**Intro:** Next Tuesday is Election Day. I have not seen a ballot yet since Kathy and I intend to go to the polls on Tuesday, so I don't know if anyone is actually being elected. But I do know from signs in countless yards, enough mailings that entire forests have been cut down for the card stock, and banners across interstate bridges that some really big ballot issues are being contested along with some funding levies. As usual there has been hot debate going and emotions can get high. The sobering thing is, that it won't be over when the polls close. This is an off year. We have an entire yearlong presidential campaign looming in front of us. And we know, from the last presidential campaign that presidential campaigns aint over when they're over.

American politics have always been emotionally charged. It's part of what has made us who we are. But for the past several decades politics has increasingly polarized us. It has come to the point, especially over the past seven years that families are divided because of their politics and holiday meals have been marred or even cancelled because of it. It's gonna be a loooong year.

I'm glad that ABC hasn't had to cancel anything because of politics. We don't all agree in our politics so we keep them to ourselves and just love one another regardless. AND I pray it's because we are godly citizens – Christ Followers first and republican or democrat or liberal or conservative somewhere on down the list. We have our work cut out for us in the days, months, and years ahead.

My text for today shows how Paul used his earthly citizenship to get the Good News out about the ultimate importance of Godly citizenship. The passage is relatively short, so it will be good if I give you some quick context and then I'll read it to you.

Paul was out on his final mission journey and was working his way back to Jerusalem. He had been preaching and collecting money for the financially strapped Christ Followers back at home base. When he arrives in Jerusalem he meets with the leadership of the Church and, like a good Jew, he goes to the temple. As he is there, a crowd beats itself into a frenzy because he has been teaching about Jesus, but even worse than that, he had Gentiles with him and was teaching that they had a place in the kingdom of God. This made the Jews furious and they would have killed him had the Romans not intervened. This very brief summary brings us to our text. Let me read it to you.

**Read Acts 21:37-39; 22:1-3**

We can see how to speak to our society as Godly Citizens by . . .

**Speaking the language**

- Paul had been violently arrested, beaten, and falsely accused. You can just imagine that he is bloody and disheveled when he is pulled free from the crowd by the soldiers. Even then he almost calmly says to the Roman official (called a tribune here) *“May I say something to you?”* But Paul says it in Greek, which is a language the tribune knew well, but he wasn't used to it here in Judea where the main language was Aramaic – which was foreign language for him. From there the official was able to learn from Paul that he wasn't some wild-eyed Egyptian rabble rouser that had been causing trouble lately, instead he was actually a cultured and educated man who knew the language of the Empire. This disarmed the tribune.
- Paul also knew his rights. In Acts 16 and again later in this same account, at the end of chapter 22, Paul asserts his rights as a Roman citizen. In both cases he is delivered from a punishment that very well may have been fatal. Here in chapter 22 he asks for an audience with Caesar but that's another story. But here in this case, Paul knew his rights and in Greek he said to the tribune, *“I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no obscure city. I beg you, permit me to speak to the people.”* Acts 21:39. The tribune was impressed and honored Paul's request.
- With this permission granted, Paul turns to the wild crowd and switches languages and speaks to them in Aramaic – which, in what I read to you, is referred to as Hebrew. Listen, *And when they heard that he was addressing them in the Hebrew language, they became even more quiet. And he said: “I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated at the feet of Gamaliel according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God as all of you are this day.”* Acts 22:2-3. Sarah Yardley writes of this, *“Even in a moment of great crisis, while mistaken for a terrorist, Paul asked for the opportunity to speak to the crowd. He was able to communicate in both Greek and Hebrew to those who*

*had gathered and could speak particularly to the culture and context of his audience.” and then she uses the E. Stanley Jones quotes you see on your bulletin, “Jesus is the speech of eternity translated into the language of time, and the language is a life.”*

- Here’s my point, we need to look for ways to speak clearly and boldly in the culture where we live. Paul spoke Greek to the Roman official and he spoke to Aramaic to the crazed crowd because he knew what they would understand. In a culture where conservatives are shouting MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN! and pro-abortion protesters are screaming KEEP YOUR HANDS OFF OUR REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS! neither side can hear what the other is saying. Don’t hear what I’m not saying here – I’m not saying either side has the correct message – but I can say this, by knowing what the Bible is saying will definitely help to give us the answer. In the meantime, we need to learn the language of all sides and love everyone with the love of Jesus. When we do, we might understand why this person thought is acceptable to storm the U.S. Capital or that person thinks its fine to abort a preborn baby at birth. Neither are right in my opinion, but they each have their reasons. Being a Godly Citizen requires that I sit down with them and find out why. Sarah Yardley, who gave me the idea for this message, writes, this prayer, “*Holy Spirit, will You anoint my language today? Make my life a message of the hope found in Jesus. Guard me from speaking the words that will instantly put others on the defensive. Gift me with language that builds bridges as I speak of Your love.*” (End Quote)
- Let’s learn to speak the language that opens eyes and calms raging souls, which is only possible by the Holy Spirit. It won’t be easy, and we are not promised that it will be. We are only required to be God’s instruments of peace.
- Here’s my other point . . .

### **The answer is not power**

- Instead, Godly citizenship is about doing what is right. Paul applied no power. He could have, but he didn’t. He had rights, but he didn’t abuse them. Instead, he used them wisely.
- The problem with getting so involved in or getting so absorbed by politics is that we surrender the power of God in our lives and allow those in earthly authority to rule our hearts and minds. Most politicians seek office initially because they genuinely want to serve their constituents, but they soon realize that they genuinely want to remain in power almost as much. We need direction from our leaders, but so much of the time they are spending most of their time maneuvering their way into more power. So, in effect, we are worrying more about them and what they say they supposedly represent, than they are worrying about what we, the ones they represent, need and want.
- Sounds cynical doesn’t it? It is until you realize that we are Godly citizens first and foremost and that helps us to see through the political fog and how the news media from both sides of the aisle are seeking to influence us. As Godly citizens we need to help clear the fog by seeking what God wants us to do rather than what the campaign ad is suggesting.
- Paul was up against a Roman tribune who looked down his nose and saw him as a troublemaker and a Jewish population that saw their religion threatened. In many ways we’re the same. It’s the rightwing way or the leftwing way and we are expected to choose one or the other. But, as it was with Paul, we know there is THE WAY of Christ that informs everything we do. This includes how we vote and what kind of citizens we are while here in this world that is not our home. David Gusik puts it this way, “*The message of Jesus – that both Paul and the New Testament preached – is this: You may come to God just as you are – Jew, Gentile, foreigner, high, low, rich, or poor – but you must come to Him through Jesus Christ.*”
- You might be shocked to know that people who consider themselves Christians voted for Joe Biden in 2020, and a lot did. But you might also be shocked to know that people who consider themselves Christian voted for Donald Trump in 2020 and a lot did. You see, it’s not who you voted for that determines whether you are a Christian or not, it’s whether or not Jesus Christ is genuinely the master of every fiber of your being rather than what party you belong to. That is what Godly Citizenship is.

**Conclusion:** The power we need to seek is that of the God of the universe. As we live these crazy days and vote this Tuesday and in every ballot from there on out until Jesus comes, let us seek the direction and perfect will of the God first, because that is what Godly Citizens do. Amen.