

Text: Acts 25.6-12
St Stephen's

July 6th, 2008
Sun

Freedom and Freedom

Israel and GAFCON; First week touring Israel

Day 1: Mt Carmel:



Day 2: Mt of Beatitudes overlooking the Sea of Galilee:



Day 3: North to the Golan Heights:



Day 4: Dead Sea and the Judean Desert:



End of the week: Jerusalem!



1200 Pilgrims from xx nations; 300 Bishops on Mt of Olives, pastors of 35 M people:



My small group:



July 4th weekend

Paul on Trial...



"They are all defying Caesar's decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus."

Acts 17:7

And that was a problem. Caesar's decrees did not leave room for another Lord. Caesar claimed divine prerogatives for himself, and himself alone...

But Jesus also had a claim on people's allegiance.

As they traveled from town to town, they delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the people to obey.

Acts 16:4

It wasn't long till the proclamation that Jesus is Lord brought Paul into conflict with worshippers of all the idols.

And you see and hear how this fellow Paul has convinced and led astray large numbers of people here in Ephesus and in practically the whole province of Asia. He says that man-made gods are no gods at all.

Acts 19:26

And that God-made men are no gods at all, because Jesus is Lord.

Christian Response:

Response #1 Affirm Legitimate Claims by Rulers

Support the legitimate aspirations and responsibilities of government
Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for

there is no authority except that which God has established.

Romans 13:1-2 (NIV)

Christian citizenship has meant since those days that we honor our government and our leaders, we obey our laws, and we work to make this country a better place to live...

Response #2 Claim Legitimate Rights as a Citizen.

Due Process

But Paul said to the officers: "They beat us publicly without a trial, even though we are Roman citizens, and threw us into prison. And now do they want to get rid of us quietly? No! Let them come themselves and escort us out."

Acts 16:37 (NIV)

Rule of Law

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?"

Acts 22:25 (NIV)

All of these eventually found their way into the Constitution and the Bill of Rights of the United States. **Good governments** and great constitutions are important blessings, worth **thanking God** for and building and defending. That is why America is the hope and dream of so many people around the world. Example: Immigration.

But **people need something more than good government.**

Response #3 Reject Ultimate Claims by Rulers

Before The Sanhedrin the apostles laid down the famous principle:

Peter and the other apostles replied: "We must obey God rather than men!"

Acts 5:29

Problem: governments are made up of people. People who are partly good and partly not so good. People who are **broken**. People who get **tempted**. The problem is **the fallibility of people**. We're 'a mixed bag'.

And the **powers** assumed by governments are a **large temptation**. When you track the response of the officials to Paul, you find out they were willing to leave him in jail and even sacrifice him to win favor with the Jews. We call that **corruption**. They were willing to **lie** to make themselves look better. Politicians are famous for **corruption** and **deception**, and **self interest**. Aren't we all?

'Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.'

One of the ironies of the book of Acts is that when Paul wrote that:

Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established.

The Caesar that ruled Rome at that time was **Nero**, who would claim divine prerogatives for himself, and eventually order the persecution of Christians and the execution of Paul and Peter.

(Standing with a flag on one side and a processional cross on the other)

Think about our Freedoms:

(Hand on the flag) **American Flag:** Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. You can live in a free country, and not be free at all. You can be captive to your passions or your fantasies or your weaknesses. I know a lot of free men and women who are captive to anger or unforgiveness or lust. Who are captive to materialism or the latest new thing, or to falling in love – over and over and over again. I know Americans who live in a free land but are slaves to themselves. "I did it my way"!

No government can free you from these things. **people need something more than good government.** The limited abilities of

government: it cannot touch the depths of the human heart.

(Hand on the cross) **Christian Cross:** Paul preached about Jesus. *Instead, they had some points of dispute with him about their own religion and about a dead man named Jesus who Paul claimed was alive.*
Acts 25:19

About a man named **Jesus** who died and came back to life. And who claimed to bring a freedom that **no government could ever deliver**, and no government **could ever take away**. Freedom from fear and sin and death and judgment. Freedom from yourself. Freedom that brings healing to our hearts and forgiveness for our sins.

This is independence weekend.

(Hand on the flag) We **thank God for our country** this weekend. For the freedom we enjoy as Americans. It is a gift that has been given. We didn't earn it; it was paid for by those who went before us. But gifts like this must be received, treasured, and protected. That is the only way they last, and the only way they will remain for those who come after us and live alongside us.

(Hand on the cross) There is **a greater freedom** that we thank God for today as well. The freedom from sin and brokenness and anger and me! It, too, is a gift that has been given. We didn't earn it; it was paid for by He who went before us. His gifts must also be received, treasured, and protected. That is the only way they will remain for those who come after us and live alongside us. It is the freedom of Jesus.

If you don't know that freedom yet, **if you are free – but not really free**, stick around and talk to Aaron or me after the service. We would love to help you find the best freedom of all...