

## 2010 ACTS #23 CHAPTER 22 STRANGERS AMONG US

### Acts 22:

Ever find yourself in a fix,  
Where you really got yourself in deep?

#### **An anthropologist went to study a far-flung tropical island.**

**He found a guide with a canoe** to take him upriver to the remote site where he would make his observations. About noon on the second day of travel up the river they began to hear drums. The anthropologist asked his guide, "What are those drums?" The guide turned to him and said, "Drums okay, but VERY BAD when they stop."

As they traveled the drums grew louder and louder.

The anthropologist was nervous, but the guide merely repeated,  
"Drums okay. Drums not bad. When drums stop, then very bad!"

Then the drums suddenly stopped. Terrified, the anthropologist yelled to the guide:  
"The drums stopped! What now?"

The guide crouched down, covered his head with his hands and said, "Guitar solo."

Well we may have gotten ourselves in a place where the drums have stopped.

In this scripture the Apostle Paul find himself in a pickle,  
He is a captive, in chains, beaten, on the way to being killed.

When **Commander Claudius Lysias**, the Roman centurion rescues him.

Well the drums have stopped and the Apostle Paul  
Asked the commander to go solo.... And speak to the Jews.

**Brothers and fathers, listen now to my defense." <sup>2</sup>When they heard him speak to them in Aramaic, they became very quiet. Acts 22:1-2**

**Paul gave his testimony**

**He showed how he too was very zealous for the Jewish way.**

**<sup>3</sup>Then Paul said: "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city. Under Gamaliel I was thoroughly trained in the law of our fathers and was just as zealous for God as any of you are today. Acts 22:3**

**He went on to say how he persecuted the early Christians.**

**<sup>4</sup>I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison, <sup>5</sup>as also the high priest and all the Council can testify. Acts 22:4**

**He was vicious in his actions with  
No regard for the innocent children  
And his affects on their lives.**

**He had them listening as he spoke,  
Then he shared the change in his life.**

**<sup>6</sup>"About noon as I came near Damascus, suddenly a bright light from heaven flashed around me. <sup>7</sup>I fell to the ground and heard a voice say to me, 'Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute me?' Acts 22:6-7**

Now Friends that may not be the way you met Jesus  
but the results are the same.

We can't stay the same person as we were before.

**" 'Who are you, Lord?' I asked." "I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting," Acts 22:8-9**

And when Paul got up.

He was blind in his eyes, but seeing in his heart.  
 He changed from a destroyer of the way  
 to a disciple of the way.

Then Jesus sends this warning,

**"When I returned to Jerusalem and was praying at the temple, I fell into a trance and saw the Lord speaking. 'Quick!' he said to me. 'Leave Jerusalem immediately, because they will not accept your testimony about me.' Acts 22:17-18**

**Sure enough the message was true.**

**Then the Lord said to me, "Go; I will send you far away to the Gentiles." Acts 22:21**

**When he said these words the whole crowd erupted.**

**Then they raised their voices and shouted, "Rid the earth of him! He's not fit to live!" Acts 22:22**

**What happened to get the Jews all worked up?**

The issue before the Jews was one of citizenship.

They were the chosen people

And how could God choose Gentiles over them?

These were fighting words.

They didn't want any illegal immigration into their citizenry

Immigration violation was a serious thing.

Because it involved a nation not just physically,

But emotionally, politically, and socially and spiritually.

Everything would be changing for the Jewish faith,

And everything will be changing for the American way of life.

Friends we are living it today.

Illegal immigration is a hot issue.

We have Christians on both sides.

We see the signs in the protests

"No human being is illegal"

"Welcome to the Wong side of the Berlin wall."

"I'm not an alien."

Many Christians are wanted higher legal immigration quotas

As well as some kind of conditional amnesty for illegal immigrants already here.

Many Evangelicals support immigration reform because of the biblical injunctions to welcome the stranger."

However there is division among church members.

Polls show church members on both sides.

Both the scriptures of Christians and Jews,

speaking about the "resident aliens,"

"foreigners in your midst,"

"sojourners and strangers among you."

**Deut 10:17-19 For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords... He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing. -- And you are to love those who are aliens, for you yourselves were aliens in Egypt." Deuteronomy 10:17-19 selected**

How a society treats strangers, foreigners and resident aliens is a major focus of the Bible.

**Exodus 22:21, "You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt."**

Leviticus 19:34 echoes and expands upon the Exodus teaching.

**"The alien who resides among you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt; I am the Lord your God." Leviticus 19:34**

Seems easy doesn't it hearing that?

But we know its not.

Alan F.H. Wisdom of the Institute on Religion and Democracy says:

Here is the dilemma:

1. A modern nation like the US is not the same as ancient Israel.

The "Aliens or sojourners" in ancient Israel were not illegal immigrants.

They were non-Israelites who were permitted to pass through or reside in Israel.

They were required to comply with Israel's law and respect its customs.

In most cases they had no opportunity to become Israelites.

2. The command in Leviticus 19 that "you shall not oppress the alien" should shape our attitudes. But it does not say how many aliens should be admitted to the US today.

Are one million "green cards" granted every year is too few, too many, or just the right number.

3. Alongside the biblical teachings about hospitality to strangers is the teachings about the rule of law. Romans 13 and I Peter 2

It is our duty to obey the law and honor those in authority over us.

when their demands do not violate conscience,

U.S. authorities and boarder guards are well within their proper power to regulate the flow of immigration.

A basic duty of any sovereign state is the ability to control its' borders.

4. It is important to distinguish the difference between the church and state.

The **church** is called by God to welcome all with the grace of Jesus Christ.

It does not make distinctions according to nationality or immigration status.

But the **state** is called by God to enforce justice with those who obey the law and those who break the law.

5. It is also crucial to understand that immigration to better one's financial position is not a priority or a right. If it were, the vast majority of the Earth's population could claim a US visa in order to enjoy the higher wages here.

IN most cases, however the better solution is to bring economic development to the countries of origin.

It is the church and not the taxpayers who should be responsible for taking care of the needs of illegal immigrants?

God has called the church to take care of the poor,

The widows the ophans and the aliens.

And we should take back that roll from the government.

If all the born-again Christians were to live and tithe.  
 We could eliminate the need for social security, Medicare, Medicaid, welfare,  
 and all the other social programs of the Government  
 and still have more money in our coffers than ever before

6. Almost everyone agrees that the current US situation with regard to illegal immigration is not desirable. Most have little commitment to this country, its laws, or its customs. And it leaves the 11 million people living on the margin of the law vulnerable to abuse and exploitation.

7. So it seems wise to reduce the number of persons here illegally.  
 The options for doing so are three.  
 Either they must be deported,  
 or they must be persuaded voluntarily to leave the US,  
 or they may be given a way to become legal US residents or citizens.  
 It is unlikely that any of these three options will be effective by itself.

Because even if we could seal all US borders  
 Nearly half of all illegal immigrants entered the country with valid visas,  
 but overstayed their visas.  
 There are no easy answers

But those who have taken the legal steps and acquired citizenship in America  
 Know what it offers them.

In his 2010 memoir, *A Journey: My Political Life*,  
 former British Prime Minister Tony Blair shares the following story:

**A friend of mine whose parents were immigrants, came to America in search of safety.** They lived and worked in New York, but were never well off, and when his father died his mother cared for the children. In time one of the children became successful and He often presented to his mother the chance to travel outside America. She never did. When she died, they opened the safety box where she kept her jewelry, inside they found another locked box. They had to drill it open. They wondered what precious jewel must be in it. When they lifted the lid, under the wrappings they found an envelope. When they opened it it was her U.S. citizenship papers. Nothing more. The most precious jewel that she treasured over any other possession was her American Citizenship. *Tony Blair, A Journey: My Political Life (Knopf, 2010), p. xvi*

She came to America in search of safety.  
 She found that her Citizenship offered her protection,  
 the opportunity to move forward and to step up.  
 To make oneself better, without fear and suspicion.  
 Her citizenship enables her to sleep at night without cause or worry  
 about an unjust arrest, or an unjust punishment without trial.

She loved her new country and the safety it provided.  
 This is exactly what the Apostle Paul knew and did  
 He used his citizenship as his shield.

**<sup>25</sup>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**

**<sup>26</sup>When the centurion heard this, he went to the commander and reported it. <sup>27</sup>The**

**commander went to Paul and asked, "Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?" "Yes, I am," he answered. Then the commander said, "I had to pay a big price for my citizenship." Acts 22:26-27**

**"But I was born a citizen," Paul replied. Those who were about to question him withdrew immediately. The commander himself was alarmed when he realized that he had put Paul, a Roman citizen, in chains. Acts 22:28-29**

I don't know how the issue of illegal immigration will be solved.  
But today I do see how important it is to be a citizen.

The benefits and the blessing we enjoy.

And how important it is to welcome one another

**"Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God Romans 15:7**

You and I have another citizenship.

The papers of which are kept in heaven.

We were not born into the Kingdom of God or its citizenship.

We cannot buy our way.

We cannot sneak, dig, or tunnel our way into it.

We are bought with a price.

The price of Jesus blood on the cross of calvary,

Purchased your redemption and

Offer you an invitation

**That whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have every lasting life. John 3:16**

When you do you receive the promise of citizenship.

Your name is written in the census book of life.

We must welcome the stranger to come

Receive and believe.

We must care for them that they too might find a spiritual home.

And discover for themselves the richness of life in Christ Jesus.

A young mom stood awkwardly in the entryway of the church with her toddler,  
A friend at work mentioned how she loved the music at her church and invited her to visit. But now looking around at all the people she did not know, she was not so sure this was a good idea. She was wondering about child care, self-conscious about the fussiness of her little child, unsure where the bath room was, to timid to ask directions, doubting whether this was the right worship service for her, or whether this was even the right church. Where was she to sit,

What was it going to feel like to sit alone with her child.

She felt the need for prayer,

For some connection to others,

to lift her above the daily grind of her job,

The unending bills

The conflict with her ex husband.

This is the stranger

God wrote about in

**You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. Deuteronomy 10:19**

We must never let happen what happened to this woman or any person  
She was going through a rough time  
She needed a connection, hope and direction,  
She after visiting a few churches where  
She came alone, sat alone, and left alone  
without anyone speaking to her or greeting her,  
her prayer for her next visit was simply.  
“I only pray that someone speaks to me today.”

Will you speak to the stranger among us?  
Before we criticize what our Government is doing,  
Maybe we need to examine what we as a Christian Church is doing.  
To the stranger among us,  
And let the welcome begin with us.