

## RIGHTEOUS IN THE RUINS 7-21-13

### *What it means to live Christianly in a day of crumbling foundations*

(Psalm 11) **1-4b** *In the Lord I take refuge; How can you say to my soul, "Flee as a bird to your mountain; 2 For, behold, the wicked bend the bow, They make ready their arrow upon the string To shoot in darkness at the upright in heart. 3 If the foundations are destroyed, What can the righteous do?" 4 The Lord is in His holy temple; the Lord's throne is in heaven.*

It has been quite a summer on planet Earth. Usually the political playing field is rather quiet in the summer, but not this year. It has been an unusual summer. Internationally we read of the ongoing civil war in Syria and the overthrow, again, of the Egyptian government. Big news there. Our own country is in trouble internationally as our friends discover we are spying on them, and now Edward Snowden tells us they are spying on Americans too. The National Security Administration has been under siege for its practices, the IRS has been embarrassed by the disclosure of bias against conservatives, Texas and North Carolina are moving toward some serious pro-life legislation, Obamacare has been put on hold, the Pirates are in first place and Paula Deen is off the air. Oh my goodness, pass the butter and the sweet tea! All of this is of great interest to Christian citizens. I hope it is of interest to you. Some of these issues, I really don't know what to think. How do we weigh the value of security vs freedom? Are we more fearful of terrorist or bureaucrats? What is worse, the present Syrian government or the future one? The present Egyptian government or the future one? (By the way, did you know the USA was giving 1.5 billion dollars per year to the Egyptian government that was implementing Islamic law and persecuting Christians?) Not only do Americans debate these things, so do the followers of Jesus. The word of God does not speak on every issue. But where it does speak, I believe that a pastoral responsibility is to help us hear the needed and relevant word from God for the challenges and opportunities of our day. So – I take on this morning the task of helping us process the recent decisions of our Supreme Court relative to marriage.

On June 26, 2013 the Supreme Court announced its rulings on two cases that concern the definition of marriage and serve to further the increasing acceptance of homosexual unions. I am not aware of any major social change that has occurred in my lifetime or previously with the suddenness of this one. The cultural sea-change of the last few years has been overwhelming. Prior to the last decade no society, no religion, no government has regarded same-sex relations as marriages. Not one in the history of the world. In the USA 1996, only seventeen years ago, 85

senators, 342 congressmen and President Clinton all supported the proposition that marriage in this country would be understood to involve one man and one woman. As little as five years ago, not a single state in our country favored same-sex marriages. Fifteen months ago, President Obama was on record as opposing homosexual marriages. Even the very blue state of California has voted twice to maintain the traditional view of marriage. But this week in California, plenty of boys were wedding boys and girls were wedding girls as a result of a Supreme Court decision that turned on the vote of one person. One person on this nine-member court makes the difference between 5-4 one way and 5-4 the other way. One vote last year declared Obamacare constitutional and majorly altered the health care industry. Now, one vote of this court overturned two popular votes of the citizens of California, and a fairly recent decision of the US Congress. Wow! That is something! And if you listen closely, you can hear the sound of cracking foundations as we redefine the very central building block of human society and relationships. Make no mistake – that is what we are doing. And many rejoice. The Sunday after the Supreme Court ruling was announced a local Presbyterian church took out an ad in the paper expressing delight over the rulings. The national cathedral in Washington D.C. rang its bells all day in celebration.

Well, what exactly did the Supreme Court decide that was so momentous? Some of us understand this, some don't and in some ways the rulings were confusing. And, they were not a total win for either side of the national debate. One ruling concerned Proposition Eight, which was a simple amendment to the constitution of California declaring that only male-female marriage would be recognized. The Supreme Court actually did not rule on the constitutionality of the amendment. As it turned out, the governor and attorney general in California, whose duty it was to defend the state's law, refused to defend it. The result was that even some of the more conservative justices on the court would not hear the case and since a lower court judge in California had ruled against proposition eight, his ruling stands for now. It is more complicated than that, but suffice it to say that the decision regarding the California law seemed to turn more on judicial technicalities than on ideology. Not so the more important decision on the Defense of Marriage Act. DOMA, as it is called, was ruled to be, in part, unconstitutional. What this means is that the United States government will recognize as legitimate marriages, the union of same-sex couples married in those states where such a thing is legal. The recent decision did not require states to make it legal nor did it require states to recognize marriages performed in other states. So, Pennsylvania still does not recognize same-sex marriages. So, it is important to understand that this ruling is very different than the Roe v Wade decision of 1973. Then the court required states to allow abortion. It made the

pro-abortion position the national standard. That has not happened yet with same-sex marriage. Yet. States may still define marriage as they please, so the culture war continues at the state level.

Okay, that is the practical implication of the ruling. But, there is more to understand. In his majority opinion, Justice Anthony Kennedy set forth the reasons why the court overturned DOMA, and it was not about state's rights. No no. Kennedy stated that the reason the legislation was tossed out was that it was intended to and did harm homosexuals. Here are quotes from the majority opinion:

- *the principal purpose and the necessary effect of this law are to demean those persons who are in lawful same-sex marriages.*
- *The avowed purpose and practical effect of the law here in question are to impose a disadvantage, a separate status, and so a stigma upon all who enter into same-sex marriages*
- *DOMA seeks to injure the very class New York seeks to protect....The Constitution's guarantee of equality "must at the very least mean that a bare congressional desire to harm a politically unpopular group cannot" justify disparate treatment of that group.*
- *DOMA humiliates tens of thousands of children now being raised by same-sex couples.*

Okay. You got all that? What the court has said is that the only grounds for defining marriage as we always have and the real reasons we have done so is that we are out to injure, demean, and humiliate homosexuals and their children. That's it! Believing that traditional marriage is good for society is invalid. Believing that our God defines marriage as man and woman is invalid. The justices of our highest court are saying, as the pro-homosex lobby has been saying, that the only reason for denying marriage to anyone is hostility and a desire to harm. Ipso facto, as Ralph Reed pointed out, this means that 85 senators, 342 congressmen, President Clinton and Barack Obama were all homophobic bigots out to injure those they did not like. And anybody still opposed to same-sex marriage is currently such a bigot. When someone files suit against the state of Pennsylvania for disallowing their same-sex marriage, do you think the state has any chance of winning with our current supreme court? No way. The nationalizing of same-sex marriage is coming. Again, I must say, "Wow!" This is extraordinary. To the extent that our five justices represent our society as a whole, the implications for us as followers of Jesus are enormous. That's what we need to talk about now.

Before we get to that however, I want to address what I am calling "deeper issues." The last two decades have witnessed this massive push to revolutionize our outlook on homosexual conduct and homosexual persons. Why? What is behind this movement, and what has motivated the

demand to redefine marriage? I have two answers for you to consider. The first deeper issue is the eradication of gender. The eradication of gender, or sexual distinctives. Bigger and deeper than the push to legalize same-sex marriage is the movement toward a society in which gender is irrelevant. The state of Massachusetts' department of education recently issued guidelines for its schools which allow students to declare their own gender, regardless of anatomy. A student may declare himself to be a girl and, having done so, is to be treated accordingly and even allowed to participate in female-only activities although they are wanting the schools to eliminate those things too. A court ruling in Colorado just gave rights to a kindergarten boy to use the girl's restroom because he thinks of himself as a girl even though his body contradicts him. Of course, we are aware of the changes in the military where we are wanting to pretend that females can fight alongside men with equal competence. All of this to say, *gender doesn't matter*. But we know differently. As Christians we read that God created us male and female. He assigns different capacities to each and different roles to each. Common sense convinces us of this as well. Little boys are different from little girls physically, mentally, emotionally and big boys and big girls are different too. But what we hear routinely nowadays is a comparison of sexism with racism. That is, if you think there should be any difference between how men and women are regarded or treated, you are just like a racist bigot. Distinctions between the sexes are like distinctions between races and should not be tolerated. What this view fails to see is that a black man and a white man are essentially the same. Race matters little or nothing. But there are considerable differences between a man and a woman. Not superiority and inferiority – but different. Black and white doesn't matter. Pink and blue do. So, as we continue to engage our culture over these matters, be alert to this ongoing push toward the eradication of gender distinctives. Graciously expose it for what it is and graciously oppose it with the truth.

The second deeper issue pertains to the motivation of homosexual advocacy. Why was there so much rejoicing over the recent decisions? Why is getting the legal status of “marriage” so important? This is especially peculiar because the push for same-sex marriage comes from the same crowd that dismisses marriage as unimportant. Plus, very few homosexuals, particularly male ones, are interested in committed, life-long relationships. That is far, far from the norm, and I think we will be surprised by how few actually take advantage of the new freedoms. What is it they are after? For some, I expect, it is money – the financial benefits that married couples may get at tax time and in probate. For these there is a tangible interest in seeing marriage redefined. But, consider that there is a longing that is far deeper and far more powerful. Look again at our quotes

from the majority opinion that speak of being demeaned and enduring a stigma and humiliation. What homosexuals are looking for so desperately is acceptance. Acceptance. As fellow humans we can all understand that, can we not? We long to be accepted – but by whom? I think ultimately we long to be accepted by ourselves, but we find that very hard if we are not accepted by others Why does it bother homosexuals if Christians don't approve of their conduct? They aren't being harmed financially by that. Homosexuals on average make more money than the rest of us. Is it maybe that what they are truly after is an approval from our culture which they hope will address and repair their own sense of shame and self-loathing? This is sad and understandable. It applies to sinners of all types, not just homosexuals. God's word says that we are guilty sinners and we seek desperately to forget that by surrounding ourselves with the voices which tell us we are okay. And nothing – nothing – infuriates us so as that brazen soul who will dare speak out and call sin, sin. Their voice, however lonely and distant, touches something deep in me that I hate and fear. This is why prophets get stoned. This is what happened to Jeremiah, and Elijah and John the Baptist and Jesus. They frustrate our desperate pursuit of self-acceptance.

What do we in the church have to offer homosexuals? We offer love. We offer pardon. We offer healing, hope, change, wholeness and yes, we offer acceptance by the grace of God and the merits of Jesus, but we cannot offer approval of certain choices and lifestyles which conflict with God's standards.

Now, let's get to what the social sea-change means for us as followers of Jesus. Our text we read from Psalm 11 says 2-3 *behold, the wicked bend the bow, They make ready their arrow upon the string to shoot in darkness at the upright in heart. 3 If the foundations are destroyed, What can the righteous do?*" My friend, the foundations of our culture are being destroyed. The sanctity of life? No more. The sanctity of private property? No more. The sanctity of marriage? No more. And you can be sure that the wicked are bending the bow, making their arrows ready and they are aiming at you if you dare defy the new morality. Listen, there isn't much so far that Christians have to worry about from these recent rulings. So, a few same-sex couples get legalized. In itself, that is not a big deal. The real challenges for Christians are still ahead. They have already begun for Christians in other states. A baker refuses to make a cake for a same-sex wedding and gets sued. A photographer refuses to take pictures and gets sued. A church won't allow such in its building. What is going to happen? Of course, these people can find another baker, another photographer, another church but since it is about approval and acceptance such acts of conscience will be challenged and our supreme court has already told us what their verdict is. You, you Bible thumping homophobic

bigot, you are guilty!! These are the arrows possibly headed your way. Chik-fila knows all about it. You may find out soon yourself. Social ostracism. Employment difficulties. Lawsuits.

So, we come to the question of our passage. What can the righteous do? For that question, let's consider five answers. Look with me at Mark 14:66 which comes to us in the context of Jesus having been arrested and made to stand for something like a trial before the Jewish Council. This was going on at the home of the high priest. **66-72** *As Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant-girls of the high priest came, <sup>67</sup> and seeing Peter warming himself, she looked at him and said, "You also were with Jesus the Nazarene." <sup>68</sup> But he denied it, saying, "I neither know nor understand what you are talking about" And he went out onto the porch. <sup>69</sup> The servant-girl saw him, and began once more to say to the bystanders, "This is one of them!" <sup>70</sup> But again he denied it. And after a little while the bystanders were again saying to Peter, "Surely you are one of them, for you are a Galilean too." <sup>71</sup> But he began to curse and swear, "I do not know this man you are talking about!" <sup>72</sup> Immediately a rooster crowed a second time. And Peter remembered how Jesus had made the remark to him, "Before a rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times." And he began to weep.* Now, I am not reading this as an example of what to do, but an illustration of what believers sometimes face when our King is hated and persecuted. Peter had told Jesus he would follow him even if it meant death. But --- when the pressure really came, he chickened out and denied even knowing Jesus. This was Peter before the resurrection. This was Peter before the Spirit fell upon Him at Pentecost. Later he would fearlessly stand before kings. But here he wimped out before a servant girl, and we all understand why. We are all familiar with this temptation. So, our first application today is to stand firm. We are admonished all over the Bible to do exactly that. And we have reason to believe that as our culture grows further and further away from its Christian roots, we will find ourselves with plenty of opportunity to stand firm against accusations and slanders and persecutions of all sorts – legal, social, financial. And not only does our Lord call us to stand firm, He even calls us to rejoice when these things occur. Matthew 5:**11-12** *Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great* I Peter 4:**14** *If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed. We don't go looking for trouble – no. But we don't deny the word of God; we don't stay quiet when lies are prevailing. We stand firm on the word of God. We speak truth into the darkness for Jesus' sake. We do it graciously, but we do it with every expectation that it may land us in some trouble because we follow Jesus. Make your decision now about how you will respond when the accusations of bigotry and hatred are flying.*

Secondly, in the ruins of a crumbling culture, what will the righteous do? They will pray for their leaders and seek the peace. I Timothy 2:1-2 *I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, 2 for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity.* As believers, we aren't looking for trouble are we? We aren't trying to create a context in which we can prove our manhood or our loyalty. We want to live quiet lives. Tranquil lives. We won't back down, but we aren't picking a fight. What we are doing is praying. The person in charge makes a big difference. Just look at Egypt right now. Look at Syria. The edicts of powerful men have powerful consequences. So, we pray for those men and women who have governmental power. And we pray to one whose name is the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords.

Thirdly, when the foundations are destroyed, what will the righteous do? They will walk as examples before the watching world. I spoke with someone recently who works at a Chik-Fila that employs a homosexual. And this particular homosexual knows he is respected by his boss and his co-workers and treated with dignity. We know there is no connection between holding to a biblical view of marriage and hating homosexuals. Let's see to it that our conduct validates our claims even when the hate is flowing our direction. I Peter 3:15-17 *sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence;<sup>16</sup> and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame. For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong.* So, we bless those who curse us. We express our esteem for a biblical view of marriage by working to have ourselves a biblical marriage. We want to have marriages and families that are the envy of the world and therefore give weight to our arguments for the Scriptural norms.

Fourthly, in order to be righteous in the ruins of western civilization, we must seek wisdom from God. We must cry out for Heaven's aid to know where to draw lines, to understand what love may mean in the complex situations in which we will find ourselves. How do you respond when invited to a homosexual wedding? When asked to take pictures for it? When asked to host it at your church? When it involves a co-worker? A sibling? A child of yours? Ohhh.... these are painful choices. Let's be willing to stand firm, but let's not be foolish about it. It is not being wimpy to invite or allow a same-sex couple into your home. There are legitimate arguments either way on a lot of these matters, but attending a wedding does not necessarily imply approval. Renting your house to a same-sex couple is no different than renting to an unmarried couple, and really, little

different than renting to unbelievers period. The major problem with homosexuals or other unbelievers is not their sexual orientation it is their spiritual orientation. They are hostile to God and that, not their choice of lovers, is the real issue and the real concern. Sin makes life extremely complex. The increasing acceptance of homosex by our culture will land us in some tough places. May God give us not only courage, but wisdom.

Finally, when the foundations are destroyed and the culture is in ruins, what will the righteous do? They will trust in Jesus only. The president will let you down. The Supreme Court will let you down. The congress will let you down. Even your church may let you down. Look again at our passage in Psalm 11. Look again at how it starts. **1a** *In the Lord I take refuge*. Look again at how it ends. After asking, *What can the righteous do?* The very next verse says **4** *The Lord is in His holy temple; the Lord's throne is in heaven*. We are directed to the Lord. No matter what the Supreme court of the United States says, there is a Supreme Court of the Universe and there is only one Judge seated there. We know His name. We know Him personally. We know He loves us. We know we are in His hand and what can separate us from Him? Not death, nor life, not angels, nor principalities, not things present, not things to come, not powers or heights or depths or any other created thing. Hallelujah!