

Psalm 11

Introduction

This morning, I want to start by asking the question: “What happened on June 26, 2015?” There are obviously different ways that people would answer that question. Here’s the answer everyone agrees on: Our nation’s highest court ruled that “The Fourteenth Amendment requires a State to license a *marriage* between two people of the same sex and to recognize a *marriage* between two people of the same sex when their *marriage* was lawfully licensed and performed out-of-State.”

So what really happened on June 26, 2015? Throughout history, there has always been the sin of homosexuality. Strictly speaking, that’s not the point today. The point is the official, legal, national recognition of these unions as “marriage” – a thing that has never happened in all the recorded history of mankind until the last fifteen years. On June 26, our nation’s highest court redefined the *very* essence and definition of marriage itself.

Now some Christians will say: “What are we all so riled up about? Who cares what the Supreme Court says? We know what the Bible says, and that’s all that matters.” And to this I would respond, “Yes – *and NO!*” There are sincere Christians who question whether we should really be getting on the bandwagon for a federal constitutional amendment to define marriage as one man and one woman. After all, what does it matter what the *government* says about marriage? In the end, people will live how they’re going to live anyway. And once again, I would respond in two ways: “Yes – *and NO!*”

There is much *about* marriage that we can learn only through the special revelation of the Scriptures. But the institution of marriage itself is woven into the very fabric of creation itself. We read in Genesis chapter one:

- ✓ Genesis 1:26–27 — Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; *male and female he created them.*

And then Genesis chapter two gives us the details:

- ✓ Genesis 2:18–24 — Then the LORD God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.” Now out of the ground the LORD God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my

flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.” Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

So you can see that *essential* to the very idea and concept of *marriage* is the *creational* difference between male and female. And we’re not *just* talking here about physical anatomy, but about *all* of God’s amazing wisdom displayed in the creation of one gender to complement and complete the other. The institution of marriage, defined as the union of a man and a woman – a male and a female – is woven into the very fabric of creation itself.

Now we have to be careful that this isn’t just a spiritual hobby horse for us, or a sanctified “soap box.” We have to remember that the *reason* for the creational difference between male and female, and so therefore the *reason* for marriage as the union of a *man* and a *woman*, is in every way God’s glory (to display His wisdom and goodness) – and so also it’s for our own *true* good and *ultimate* happiness. That’s a message we need to be able to communicate to the world around us.

But even if the world were never to read the Bible, or never to hear the testimony of the Church, the world would still know what marriage is because marriage, as an institution, is fundamental to our very existence as humans, as a culture, as a civilization. Al Mohler writes:

“Pitirim Sorokin, founder of the department of sociology at Harvard University, made very clear that marriage stands at the center of civilization and is what he called the ‘civilizational essential.’ Without marriage, no social structure larger than marriage can be sustained. There can be no community, no culture, no enduring patterns of human life.”

Marriage has been woven *by God Himself* into the very fabric of creation itself. “God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; *male and female he created them.*” Now remember, we’re not *just* talking about sexuality! We’re talking about *marriage*. So now maybe we can see that what happened on June 26 is a tragedy of *incomprehensible* proportions. When the Supreme Court makes something called “homosexual *marriage*” the law of the land, creation itself groans – in a way that it never has before. It’s only at the *very end* of a nation’s rejection of God that such a thing could possibly take place. Only at the *very end*. And yet we’ve come to that end – or at the very least, we’ve come to the beginning of that final end.

So what are we to do? How should we respond today – five years, ten years, twenty years down the road? It’s easy to be tempted to fear. If we’re not tempted to fear, then I don’t know that we’ve rightly understood what’s happening. We may feel like running and hiding. And in fact, there may be those who would counsel these very things! But listen to what the Psalmist says in Psalm chapter eleven.

I. Psalm 11:1–3 — In the LORD I take refuge; how can you say to my soul, “Flee like a bird to your mountain, for behold, the wicked bend the bow; they have fitted their arrow to the string to shoot in the dark at the upright in heart; if the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?”

This is the counsel of despair and hopelessness. “Flee! Run and hide! The wicked are lurking everywhere, you’re no longer safe.” “And anyway, if the very foundations themselves are destroyed, what point is there any longer? What can you possibly do?” One commentator says: “The word ‘foundations’ is figurative for the established customs, laws, and ways of life in the land... it refers to the stays of society, the things upon which the culture is built... These were apparently in danger of being ‘thrown down’ ... The appeal is that in the face of such anarchy, what can the righteous do?” (Ross) Isn’t that the place we find ourselves in now? The very foundations are being destroyed. And as the foundations are being destroyed, the righteous are more and more isolated and exposed as the target for all the world’s hatred and hostility. A very real kind of anarchy is taking control – a complete and utter disregard for the law of God. And even as the very fabric of creation is being rent asunder, and the eventual destruction of our civilization guaranteed, the world claims for itself the moral high ground, from which it hurls at the church the accusations of bigotry and hate crimes.

So what can the righteous do? Those who would counsel the Psalmist have clearly implied that there is *nothing* the righteous can do but to run, to flee, and to hide. There are many different ways that we could run and hide. Some people show their fear by retreating into a bubble and remaining as silent and as inconspicuous as possible. Others show their fear by pretending that it’s not nearly so bad as people are making it out to be. Others show their fear by beginning to subtly compromise or “soft pedal” the truth. And then there are some people who show their fear by “ranting and raving,” and venting their so-called “righteous indignation.” But *all* of these things are just different ways of giving in to the counsels of fear. And it’s to *all* such counsel that the Psalmist responds in no uncertain terms in verses 1-3, “In the LORD I take refuge; *how* can you *say* to my soul, ‘Flee like a bird to your mountain...’”? If we have truly taken refuge in the Lord, what reason can there possibly be to flee? If we have truly taken refuge in the Lord, then there can never be any reason to panic, to despair, to be full of fear!

Now notice: the Psalmist never minimizes the situation. He doesn’t deny that the wicked bend their bow and fit their arrow to the string to shoot in the dark at the upright in heart. He doesn’t deny that the foundations are, in fact, being destroyed. He’s not sticking his head in the sand and pretending things really aren’t so bad. He simply takes refuge in the LORD. And from this place of refuge and safety, the Psalmist can remain confident and unafraid even when the very foundations of the world around him are crumbling and falling to pieces. That’s *something*, isn’t it?

My brothers and sisters, when we give in to fear, when we allow even the faintest hint of hopelessness to enter our souls, then we can be guaranteed that *whatever* our response may be to the culture in which we live, it will never truly honor God. So our *first* response to what happened on June 26 (assuming we have rightly and fully understood what *actually* happened on June 26) *must* be to take refuge in the LORD, so that we might be confident, and fearless, and utterly unafraid. You see, it’s *only* from this place of absolute refuge and safety that we can truly be freed to speak the *truth* of God’s Word boldly. It’s only from this place of absolute refuge and safety that we can truly be freed to *love* even those who hate us – to love even those who accuse *us* of being the ones guilty of bigotry and hate.

So after utterly rejecting all the counsels of fear and despair, the Psalmist goes on not just to *say* that he takes refuge in the Lord, but to actually, actively engage in the *act* of taking refuge in the Lord. In the last five verses, the Psalmist doesn't just exhort us to take refuge in the LORD, he shows us *how*. As the wicked bend their bow and fit their arrow to the string to shoot in the dark at the upright in heart, and as the very foundations of the world are crumbling around him, the Psalmist confesses this truth:

II. Psalm 11:4a – The LORD is in his holy temple; the LORD's throne is in heaven.

When the foundations are crumbling, we naturally look for something sure, something solid, something stable and unmoving to take hold of. And we find this *only* in God's sovereign rule and reign over all the earth. From His throne in heaven, the Lord cannot be touched by the upheaval and turmoil on the earth. *He* is never threatened, or surprised, or worried. Even as the foundations of the world are being ripped to pieces, the Lord's dwelling place is completely unassailable, and untouchable. Wilson writes: "He is not undermined or panicked by the disorder and destruction that dismay humans; instead, he remains unshaken and eternally in power." To confess this truth in faith *is* to take refuge in the Lord. So we must be a people who diligently, and gladly, and vocally confess this truth in faith. "The LORD is in his holy temple; the LORD's throne is in heaven."

One thing this *necessarily means* is that marriage still remains today, on July 19, what it has always been since the creation of the world – the union of a man and a woman, a male and a female. As John MacArthur has rightly said, "No human court has the *authority* to redefine marriage, and the verdict [of the US Supreme Court] does not change the God ordained reality of marriage." In other words, the verdict of the US Supreme Court cannot change the counsels and decrees of the King of kings and Lord of lords – the one who is in His holy temple; the one whose throne is in heaven. Marriage can only, ever be what God has *said* it is. And so may this be a reminder to us all of the sacredness of marriage, and of our responsibility to guard and keep our own marriages in full obedience to God. Calvin writes:

"When in the world all justice lies trodden under foot, and faithfulness has perished, [David then] reflects that God sits in heaven perfect and unchanged... when, therefore... all things are thrown into disorder and darkness by injustice and wickedness, let faith serve as a lamp to enable us to behold God's heavenly throne, and let that sight suffice to make us wait in patience" – and I would add: in confident, fearless hope!

"The LORD is in his holy temple; the LORD's throne is in heaven..."

III. Psalm 11:4b – His eyes see, his eyelids test the children of man.

We confess that the Lord's throne is in heaven, but we also confess that He is not unaware or oblivious to the things that happen on the earth. He knows it all. "His eyes *see*." And *seeing*, He is not uncaring, or unconcerned, or indifferent. He is the righteous Judge before whom all the world will one day stand – including Presidents and Supreme Court Justices. Including you, and me. "His *eyelids test* the children of man."

One commentator says that “eyelids” “probably refers to the squinting that takes place in focusing closely on an object.” (Ross) Even the word for “see” is the less common word meaning “to gaze, to look intently, to behold.” (Ross) And so the point is that as God looks deeply into the hearts of all men, He sees through all the smokescreens, and all the lies, and all the deceptions, and all the excuses and justifications, and He is able to *distinguish* clearly and decisively between the righteous and the wicked. In a day when evil is being called good and good is being called evil, when darkness is put for light and light is put for darkness, when bitter is put for sweet and sweet is put for bitter, we can take refuge in the God who *sees* – who divides and distinguishes between the righteous and the wicked. (cf. Isa. 5:20-21) In a day when the recognition of homosexual “marriage” is claimed as the moral high ground and all those who resist are accused of bigotry and hate, we can take refuge in the God whose “eyelids test the children of man,” forever and unceasingly dividing and distinguishing between what is truly righteous and what is truly wicked. And as we take refuge in the righteous Judge, may this also be a reminder *to us* to flee all that is evil in our own lives, and to pursue with all of our hearts true righteousness and godliness with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. (1 Tim. 6:11; 2:22)

“The LORD is in his holy temple; the LORD’s throne is in heaven; his eyes see, his eyelids test the children of man...”

IV. Psalm 11:5-6 – The LORD tests the righteous, but his soul hates the wicked and the one who loves violence. Let him rain coals on the wicked; fire and sulfur and a scorching wind shall be the portion of their cup.

The Lord’s faithfulness to expose and maintain the distinction between the righteous and the wicked is not just something He does to pass the time! God has a passionate, vested interest in making these distinctions. And why is this? It’s because His soul hates the wicked and the one who loves violence. Do you *know* that about God? Yes, those are really strong words, and sometimes they make us uncomfortable. But we ignore them or water them down only at our own peril. God’s hatred of the wicked and the violent is not a bitter, spiteful, “mean-spirited” hatred (like we usually think of). It’s a holy, pure, and *necessary* hatred. It’s a hatred that flows from the very essence of His being as the God who is “holy, holy, holy.” If we’re offended by this hatred, then really what we’re offended at is the faithfulness of God to *be* God.

So who are the wicked and the violent that God hates? In verse two, the wicked are those who bend the bow and fit their arrow to the string to shoot in the dark at the upright in heart. God’s hatred is given in the first place to all those who oppose the righteous. Then in verse three, we saw that there were those who were destroying the moral foundations of society. And *however* someone might go about destroying the foundations of society, that can only be described as violence. When the Supreme Court rules that there is such a thing as “homosexual marriage,” this is a studied act of violence, and the Scriptures are clear: The Lord hates those who love violence.

So what the psalmist does next is simply to pray in accordance with the very essence and being of God: “Let Him rain coals on the wicked; fire and sulfur and a scorching wind shall be the portion of their cup.” Even here, this is *not* a personal vendetta. This is *not* a mean-spirited, bitter

hatred. We need to zealously guard against even the faintest hint of this in our own hearts. In *many* other places, the Psalmist prays that all the nations of the world might come to Jerusalem to worship God in His temple. So obviously what he really longs for is their repentance and salvation. But *here* the Psalmist is assuming only those who are stubbornly unrepentant to the very end. And so this is really just a *confession of faith* that the moral order and goodness of God's creation *will* finally be upheld in the everlasting punishment of the wicked.

Let me ask you: Do you tremble at the thought of what a fearful and terrifying punishment this will be? See how the Psalmist heaps up such vividly descriptive words: "raining coals... fire... sulfur... scorching wind." Brothers and sisters! When we're tempted to be afraid because we're in the minority; when we're tempted to be afraid because we see ourselves being set up as the target of the wicked; when we're tempted to be afraid because there are those around us who are violently destroying the very foundations of society; we need to actively remember what their end will be apart from repentance, and then exchange all of our fear for gratitude and pity. Gratitude to God that we have been spared the terrors of His wrath through no goodness or merits of our own! And a very real pity that moves us to pray for the repentance and the salvation of the wicked and the violent.

As the Psalmist models for us what it looks like to take refuge in the Lord, he closes with these words:

V. Psalm 11:7 – For the LORD is righteous; he loves righteous deeds; the upright shall behold his face.

Yahweh is not just a God who hates; He is a God who *loves*. Because He is *righteous*, therefore He *loves* the righteous. And because He loves the righteous, therefore He has promised that they shall behold His face.

So often our fears are really just the result of our earthly and carnal loves. We love the things in this world, and so when our worldly happiness is threatened, we're afraid. We've put down strong roots in this world, and so when we consider the chance that those roots might be disturbed, we become fearful. But what if our chief love was God – the one who created us, and who has now given us His great salvation, so rich and free? What if every day our deepest desire and happiness was to behold His face, and to know His favor and blessing upon our lives? Well, then, what reason could the righteous ever have for fear, if we know the promise of His Word? We need to be a people who are diligently, and gladly, and loudly confessing this truth in faith: "The LORD is righteous; he loves righteous deeds; the upright shall behold his face." What this *means* is that we have the promise of being, every single day of our lives, on the receiving end of this benediction:

✓ Numbers 6:24–26 — The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his *face* to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.

When our deepest desire is to behold God's face (to know His favor and blessing upon our lives), then not only will we have no reason for fear, but we'll be able to show to a world that's looking

for happiness and fulfillment in all the wrong places just where true happiness and fulfillment are really found. One of the four “pillars” of the Supreme Court ruling was essentially the individual’s right to “happiness.” Even as the world rebels against God, it goes on frantically pursuing what only God can give. So by God’s grace, may our lives be constant, living testimonies to the world that the only real and lasting happiness is found in living righteously by faith in God, and so knowing the *privilege* of always beholding His face.

Conclusion

When the wicked bend their bow and fit their arrow to the string to shoot in the dark at the upright in heart—when the very foundations of society are being destroyed, the righteous take *refuge* in the Lord. And from this place of refuge we can look out and be confident, and fearless, and utterly unafraid. Not only that, but we can also be the faithful witnesses and testimonies that God calls us to be to a lost and dying world.

So how do we take refuge in the Lord? – By diligently, gladly, and loudly *confessing* these truths *by faith*:

“The LORD is in his holy temple; the LORD’s throne is in heaven.”

“The LORD’S eyes see, his eyelids test the children of man.”

“The LORD tests the righteous, but his soul hates the wicked and the one who loves violence. Let him rain coals on the wicked; fire and sulfur and a scorching wind shall be the portion of their cup.”

“The LORD is righteous; he loves righteous deeds; the upright shall behold his face.”