

The Coming Storm

Various

June 28, 2015

Introduction:

It was nearly two years ago almost to the day that I stood up here and gave a sermon shortly after the Supreme Court ruled on the legality of the Defense of Marriage Act and discussed the impact of that ruling and what it meant to us as Christians. As I began that message two years ago, I said this,

“After the Supreme Court ruling this week, I think it is safe to say that we’ve lost the game. We still need to play it out and it will continue to be played out in individual states and in the courts for years to come, but I think at this point the handwriting on the wall is legible. It’s highly unlikely that any kind of constitutional amendment or further Supreme Court ruling will overturn the right of each state to sanction same-sex marriage. If anything, should a case come before the Supreme Court that would demand a ruling on the constitutionality of same-sex marriage, given the current make-up of the Court and the prevailing winds of public and legal opinion, it would be difficult to imagine anything other than same-sex marriage being enshrined into federal law. It’s only a matter of time before gay marriage is made law in most if not all states. It’s no longer a question of *if* it will happen, only of *when* and how soon.”

Well, here we are. On Friday the Supreme Court made same-sex marriage legal in all 50 states. All states must recognize the marriage of couples in any other state and must issue marriage licenses to couple who wish to get married. While this was still likely going to be the case eventually had the Supreme Court ruled differently and allowed individual states to make their own decisions, seeing how only 13 states still had same-sex marriage bans left on the books, this now puts an end to the waiting game and simply settles the matter for all states by judicial fiat.

I don’t think I would be overstating it to say that this week’ ruling is a significant cultural milestone on a level that the *Roe vs. Wade* decision on 1973 was in regards to abortion rights. This is *the* landmark decision on the matter of gay rights and it will have deep and significant consequences in the years to come. Although we have been moving rapidly in this direction for many years now, this decision marks a significant dividing line between what was before and what is yet to come.

Now I’m not up here to launch into some kind of angry denunciation of the Supreme Court or our leaders. Nor am I up here to rally the troops to try to “Take America back for God.” In fact, at this point we really need to stop all such language that imagines we can reclaim our nation for Christ by political means. Whatever golden age you think we can somehow return to by just voting for the right candidate, that kind of wishful thinking needs to be laid to rest. We’re not returning to the good-old days, however you define them. Our country, in regards to how it views homosexuality and how it views those who oppose it, has radically changed, and we need to look it squarely in the eye and prepare for it.

What I want to do this morning instead is try to help you in thinking through the weeks and months ahead. I know this issue is on everyone's minds and so I felt it imperative that I pause our normal sermon series in Matthew in order to address this and strike while the iron is hot, as they say. So if you are a visitor here this morning, please know this is not the normal approach I take to preaching. I'm usually working through a book of the Bible, verse-by-verse, but once in a while I need to give specific attention to larger cultural concerns and this morning just happens to be one of those Sundays. So then, I don't have a bulletin insert for sermon notes since I didn't start on this message until Friday afternoon, but we do have sheets for sermon notes in the pew in front of you and so I would encourage you to use those if you are so inclined.

I have six things I want to say to you this morning that I believe are important for us to do as we go forward. The first one I dare say right now is the most important for us as we watch the news and read our Facebook feeds and deal with a mix of emotions as we see the joyful celebrations unfold. So the first thing I would say to you is...

1. Rejoice in the sovereign kingship of God

I know right now the idea of rejoicing is hardly the emotion we're feeling. We're sad, we're discouraged, we're depressed, we're angry, we're fearful... but rejoicing? Yes, rejoicing. Turn with me to Psalm 2 for a moment. I want us to get our eyes off the news reports and Facebook posts and place gaze up to heaven for a moment so we can gain some proper perspective. So then, follow along as I read v. 1-6 of Psalm 2.

*"Why do the nations rage
and the peoples plot in vain?
The kings of the earth set themselves,
and the rulers take counsel together,
against the LORD and against his Anointed, saying,
"Let us burst their bonds apart
and cast away their cords from us."*

*He who sits in the heavens laughs;
the Lord holds them in derision.
Then he will speak to them in his wrath,
and terrify them in his fury, saying,
"As for me, I have set my King
on Zion, my holy hill."*

If we look at how the kings and judges and people of our nation have cast off the restraints of God's Word in order to celebrate sexual immorality, we are discouraged by it all. But what does God do as he looks upon it all? "He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision." God doesn't see this as any kind of threat to him. He laughs it off. He holds the scheming and plotting and rebellion of men in derision. He says in v. 6, "As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill." Christ is King. He is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He is reigning in heaven right now. All human plotting that would burst the bonds of God's rule in sinful rebellion to him is of no

worry to him. Christ sits enthroned in heaven and no matter what sinful men do, God is still in absolute control to work for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. The sovereign throne of God did not become empty last Friday. He still reigns supreme over the earth, and he is the judge of the ultimate supreme court of the universe and his judgments are *a/ways* right.

So guys, first things first: rejoice in God's sovereignty. Your God reigns. Find joy and celebrate that no human judicial decision, no law, no public opinion, can alter the fact that our God is in total control of every person, every law, every event, everything! We need not fear that the world is spinning out of control: it isn't. God has his reasons for allowing such sweeping social changes to take place – we may not understand them, but we can rejoice that our good and perfect Lord is in total control of them. So don't give into anger or discouragement: rejoice in the Lord always, again I say, rejoice!

So God is in control, but his sovereignty doesn't free us from our responsibility. So the second thing I want to say to you this morning is...

2. Stand on the Word of God

After warning his readers of the wickedness and apostasy of the last days, the apostle Paul says in 2 Timothy 3:14,

“But as for you, continue in what you've learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”

We need to stand firm on what God's Word says about human sexuality. The Bible is clear and unambiguous about homosexual behavior: it is a sin. It's displeasing to God. Those who practice it will not inherit the kingdom of God. Such a belief is now at radical odds with our prevailing culture but it is what God's Word clearly teaches, what the church historic has universally believed for nearly two thousand years, and is what we must also affirm if we are to claim to be biblical Christians. The battle lines are now drawn: either you will stand on the truth of Scripture's warning against homosexual behavior or you'll capitulate to the cultures' carte blanche acceptance of it. Where will you stand?

But beyond just standing upon the truth that homosexual behavior is sinful, we need to equally stand upon the solution to the sin problem: the gospel. The apostle Paul says in Romans 1:16, *“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.”* We must not only call sin, “sin,” we must with joy and boldness call people to repentance and faith in Christ. If we do nothing more than denounce sin without offering the hope of freedom and forgiveness that is found in Christ, then we will have failed in our biblical responsibility as Christ's ambassadors.

Turn with me to 1 Corinthians 6 for a moment. What the apostle Paul has to say to us here is vital for us to understand if we are going to rightly stand on God's Word. I'm in 1 Corinthians 6, starting at v. 9. Here's what he says,

“Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.”

Paul is calling sin “sin” here. If you regularly practice various sinful activities, with homosexuality being among them, you will not inherit the kingdom of God. We need to believe that. We need to winsomely and tactfully but firmly and clearly communicate that to those who are gay.

But let's dare not forget to say more by also communicating the wonderful gospel truth of v. 11. What does it say in v. 11?

“And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”

We need to tell them they are not stuck in their sin. What you identified yourself with once is not what you must be. “And such were some of you.” Through faith in Christ, you can be washed, sanctified, justified, forgiven, and made a new creation. We must stand on both truths of Scripture: the identification of homosexual behavior as sin but also the forgiveness and freedom from that sin to be found in Christ.

This then brings us to my next point. While we need to stand on God's Word which is straightforward and clear on the sinfulness of homosexual behavior, we also need to grow in our understanding of what Scripture says, why it says it, and how to engage and refute arguments that are marshalled against it. So then third, I say this to you...

3. Do your homework

Go to the back of your Bibles now and turn to 1 Peter 3:15. Peter is addressing believers who are undergoing persecution and is instructing them on how to rightly respond to the harsh and unbelieving skeptics in their lives. Please follow along as I read just v. 15

“But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you...”

We need more than simply responding to those who disagree with us with, “The Bible says so.” You need to understand why it says so. You need to be prepared to deal with the arguments that reinterpret those passages. You need to be able to provide some reason why two people who love each other shouldn't be married. In other words, we need to bone up and think more carefully and deeply about these issues.

Throughout church history, different generations have had to dig the spade deep into particular theological soil. In the early church, Christology had to be hammered out as Augustine and Athanasius and others had to wrestle with question about the divinity and humanity of Christ. During the Reformation, the doctrine of Scripture and salvation were fiercely debated as Christians studied to understand the nature of grace and faith and justification. It seems that in our generation, we are faced with the question of gender roles and sexuality. So the ball is in our court now to work hard at developing our thinking in this area. We are responsible to future generations to be careful and studious exegetes of Scripture so that we get this right and we are responsible to our current generation to be “prepared to make a defense” for our belief. The issues of homosexuality, transgender issues, and very soon I promise you the promotion of polygamy will be issues we need to think through carefully.

Because if we don't think through these carefully, if we get sloppy on this and don't shore up the walls as it were we face two dangers. First, we won't have an answer for those who challenge us and will offer them nothing to refute their claims, and so we'll give them little reason to believe us. If we have no answers to their questions or objections, we have no reason to think they will repent and believe. But second, there is a danger for us personally. The entire weight of culture is now decisively against us. Movies, television shows, Facebook, blogs, cable news, public schools, books and magazines – all of them will work to undermine our faith and normalize sin. Do not think you're immune to it. Do not think your children are immune to it. The normalizing pressure upon us is and will continue to be immense. You need to do your homework, to read, to study, to think carefully about this or else you may come to believe this cultural lie and shipwreck your faith.

So in light of this, I changed next month's *Tolle Lege* book from what I had originally planned to a book by Kevin DeYoung entitled, *What Does the Bible Teach about Homosexuality?* I want to help you shore up the walls of your mind. Deepen your thinking about this. Prepare the defenses against arguments that can easily confuse you. This isn't the time to be lazy intellectually. Do some homework and read to help you think more clearly and biblically about the issue of homosexuality. I want to help you in this regard but I can't do it if you don't do the work of reading yourself. Let's not drop this ball. It is upon us to defend our faith and think carefully about this. Let's do what it takes to think more clearly and biblically.

But in addition to these things, I want to call us to do something that we dare not forget to do during this troubling times and that bring us to our fourth point, which is to...

4. Pray

The reigns of cultural influence are no longer in our hands. We don't control the media. Our viewpoint has been and increasing will be excluded from the halls of cultural power. But we have one resource available to us: the power of prayer. We have access to the God of all power and authority and it is to him we must come and seek if we hope to see any progress in the lives of others or our society.

So this means that we need to be praying for those who we're trying to witness to who disagree with us about homosexuality, whether because they practice it themselves or are supportive of those who do. Yes, we must do our homework and articulate a defense for the Bible's teaching, but only God can change the heart, so we must pray. Rational arguments have their place, and God uses them, but there is a spiritual blindness that must be overcome for someone to believe and only the power of the Holy Spirit can do that. We must come to God in prayer and ask him to do what only he alone can do to bring a sinner to see his sin and respond in faith.

But further, we need to be in prayer for our culture. While the battle over gay marriage is now effectively over, the war will continue to be waged. You must understand this isn't about marriage – the marriage question is just an important milestone on a much larger campaign. The war's real goal is about gaining complete and total acceptance of homosexuality in our culture and it will not stop until all surrender or are crushed by legal or cultural pressure. So let me be clear about where the next battle line is so you can be in prayer regarding it and that concerns Christian institutions and what happens to them if they continue to affirm the biblical teaching on homosexuality.

There is celebrating this weekend, but come Monday, come tomorrow, the new phase of the cultural war will begin in earnest upon Christian institutions. What will our public universities do to Christian groups like the Navigators or CRU who refuse to embrace the new cultural norms? Will they be kicked off the campuses? What will our public schools do to the teenager who dares to say that homosexual behavior is a sin to a fellow classmate? Will he be suspended for bullying or even charged with a hate crime? For Christian businesses, will they be forced to recognize gay marriages and supply them health insurance as a married couple? And far more serious, what will happen to private Christian schools who refuse to admit homosexual students, or deny them married housing, or hire openly gay teachers, or continue to espouse biblical teaching on sex and marriage? Will they lose accreditation? Will their tax exempt status be revoked?

Be in prayer about this because this is a very serious possibility. If a school like Moody Bible Institute in downtown Chicago loses its tax-exempt status, the cost for property taxes on the land they own in the heart of downtown Chicago would be staggering! Or if a school like Grace College loses its accreditation, admission will drop significantly. And if a school should both lose its accreditation and its tax-exempt status, schools will be forced to either change their statement of faith and embrace homosexuality or close their doors. That scenario is not fear-mongering, not some far-fetched possibility. No my friends, it is the very real and logical consequence of the Supreme Court decision and the political and ethical climate of our country right now. This is the new battle line and our schools and para-church organizations are facing a potentially devastating choice between capitulation and closing their doors. So please, be in prayer for them in the upcoming month and years because this is far more serious than just the question of wedding photographers and cake decorators. This has the potential of being devastating to a larger number of Christian institutions of all types.

Fifth, I need to say this to you...

5. Expect persecution

We know the passages. Jesus said in Matthew 5, *“Blessed are you when other revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account...”* He said in Matthew 10, *“You will be hated by all for my name’s sake”* and that a servant is not above his master: if they persecuted him, they will persecute us as well. My friends, these are no longer passages you will be able to read in the abstract. No longer will you enjoy the cultural privilege of being the default religious and ethical view of society. The place of Christianity being accepted as the cultural norm is over.

Here’s the new norm: to claim to be a follower of Christ and hold to biblical morals in regards to sexual ethics, you will be lumped in with bigots, with racist with those who hate and are intolerant and ignorant. I now that isn’t true but few are concerned with being truthful in their labeling anymore. In our culture’s eyes, you are no better than a Bull Connor or a Ku Klu Klan member. We do not control the overarching metaphor that has equated gay rights with civil rights and those who oppose it as racists and so this is the label you will have to wear in our country from now into the foreseeable future if you want to faithfully follow Christ.

And if you want to know how people will treat you for your views on homosexuality, you only need to look at what they do to anyone they consider racist. This is the reality of the times we live in, and so you and I are going to have to count the cost. To follow Christ is to become a social pariah, an outcast, an undesirable, a person worthy of only mockery and derision. You might lose your job. Your business might be hit with a lawsuit meant only to bankrupt you and force you to close your doors. You may be slandered over the internet. Former friends may disassociate with you. This is no longer what happens to Christians living “over there;” it’s here and it’s here to stay. You and I must courageously face this fact, no matter how much we may not like it, and choose to endure the shame and suffering that Jesus warned us would come to those who followed him. It’s been a good run in our country for a long time, a safe and affirming place to be a Christian, but that time is now past. Expect persecution.

But there is one more thing I want to say to you this morning as we prepare to live in this new world our culture has created for itself, and that is this: we must...

6. Respond to hate with love

The same Lord who taught us homosexuality is wrong and taught us that we would be hated and persecuted for his sake also taught us how we are to respond to those who hate us. Turn to Luke 6 for a moment. In Luke’s version of the Sermon on the Mount, he records Jesus saying these famous words in v. 27. Follow along as I read.

“But I say to you who hear, ‘Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.’”

We must respond with love. We cannot fight fire with fire. We cannot answer hateful words with hateful words of our own. We cannot respond to violence with violence. If we are going to unjustly labeled with the civil rights movements, very well then, but let us show them what side we really represent. So then let us follow the example of our African-American brothers and sisters in Christ and respond as they did to those who sneered and slandered and abused them with love, with gentleness, with kindness, and with prayer.

Listen, I'm just like the rest of you guys. I see the news casts and the Facebook posts and I get angry. Righteous anger sometime and not so-righteous anger other times. I've made my share of snarky posts on Facebook, of mean-spirited comments, or ugly and inflammatory outbursts against those who celebrate sin and mock the faithful. I know how you feel. But you and I need to repent of those times when in our words and actions we have allowed our own anger and fear and pride and disappointment to vent themselves against those who oppose us. If we want to change hearts and minds then we would be wise to learn the power of redemptive suffering. The Civil Rights movement worked because they were will to suffer, to not respond to dogs and fire hoses and verbal and physical abuse at restaurants with anger and hate. Now, so must we. Jesus told us to respond to our enemies with love, to turn the other cheek, to do good to those who hate us, and pray for those who abuse us. That is our calling and it is what we must do going forward.

And this in turn will put those who witness it to shame. Go to one last passage with me, 1 Peter 3:14. We read from this passage a bit earlier but I want to read the verses surrounding it. Peter writes there starting at v. 14,

“But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.”

My friends, this is the challenge before us. We can't change laws. We don't control the news media. We aren't television producers or screenwriters. But here's what we can do: respond to those who hate us with gentleness and respect. We can respond to insults and slander with kindness. We can turn the other check when abused, refusing to retaliate in kind. And in so doing, those who see our response will be put to shame. They will be forced to see that we are nothing like those who were the true racists, in fact they may see it is they who are the ones guilty of slandering, insulting, and abusing us and be ashamed. Jesus has called us to this – to love our enemies – and so in the months and years ahead, it is imperative we strive to do so. Let's make sure our witness in our workplace and on Facebook and among our friends is one that is honoring to Christ as we humbly and gently love our enemies and do good to those who persecute us.

Conclusion

So as I close, we need to be aware, a storm is coming. The Supreme Court decision on Friday did not end the battle: it has only opened up a host of new fronts. The days ahead for us will be more difficult than the ones before. You will be hated. Legal challenges will be raised. There will be far more heat than light and you may get burned in the process. We must not be surprised by it – Jesus said it would happen and has happened to many Christians across the globe both today and in the past – we're just a little late to arrive.

But God has shown us what we must do as we move ahead. We need to rejoice in the sovereign Lordship of Christ our King, who rules over all affairs of history. We need to stand firm on the Word of God and do our homework so we can defend our own hearts against error and answer the objections of others. We need to pray for the unbelievers we are trying to reach and for the protection and preservation of Christian institutions and organizations who will be facing severe legal assaults in the months ahead. We have to accept the fact that our cultural place of privilege as Christians is past and now persecution, as least on a verbal level, but possibly much more, is going to be the norm. And finally, we need to follow the example of our Lord, who loved his enemies, who refused to respond to insult with insult, mockery with mockery, violence with violence.

May God give us the strength to resist the cultural pressures to capitulate on the truth of God's Word and may we with kindness and gentleness hold out the offer of grace, mercy, forgiveness, and freedom found in the gospel of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Let's pray.

This sermon was addressed originally to the people at Grace Fellowship of Waterloo, IA by Pastor Rob Borkowitz. Copyright 2015.