



Canceled: A sermon by Pastor Rob Douglass

Editor's Note: One of the things that makes Rob Douglass a great pastor is that he wades into waters where many others in his position fear to dip a toe—if he deems the topic important enough for the times and after he consults with the Lord for the right words. Even then, he humbly asks the Lord to strike the words that are not His from the hearers' understanding. We're reprinting his recent sermon on "cancel culture" here for any who missed it and for those who heard it and want a second read.

This sermon is from July 18, 2021:

Despite the fact that some people were excited when the bulletin indicated the message was Canceled, I preached the following message at Dillsburg Brethren in Christ Church.

Scripture Reference: John 16: 1-11

"All this I have told you so that you will not fall away. 2 They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, the time is coming when anyone who kills you will think they are offering a service to God. 3 They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me. 4 I have told you this, so that when their time comes you will remember that I warned you about them. I did not tell you this from the beginning because I was with you, 5 but now I am going to him who sent me. None of you asks me, 'Where are you going?' 6 Rather, you are filled with grief because I have said these things. 7 But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. 8 When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: 9 about sin, because people do not believe in me; 10 about righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; 11 and about judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.

When I was a young child, one of my grandfather's best friends was man by the name of

Wayne Casner. He was a manly man. Among my fond memories of Wayne was the time he rescued my cousins and me from a traumatic encounter with a black snake.

But I mention Wayne today for another reason, he was able to look up at the sun tell what time it was by judging where it was in the sky.

I would like to be a man like Wayne. In what follows, I would like to give it a try.

I want to share with you some of my heart regarding the times that we are living in and the alarming pace of the changes we are experiencing.

In high school, I was a member of the National Forensics League (debate club). I remember our coach, Mr. Cavanaugh teaching us that whoever gets to define the terms, usually wins the debate.

I have found that to be true. We can see this in the abortion debate in America. In the 1980's the two sides of the abortion debate were either pro-abortion vs. pro-life or pro-choice vs. pro-life. In the never-ending attempt to sway public opinion on abortion, nowadays the pro-abortion side refers to itself as pro-reproductive rights. What could be more American than being on the side of rights? The implication is that anyone that us against the free practice of abortion is against rights, which is un-American.

We could also talk about all of the phobias that are around today. Views that someone opposes are often said or thought of as being motivated by some kind of kind of illogical fear (phobia). This move immediately puts the one being labelled as whatever-phobic on the defensive, having to prove that he/she is not illogical or afraid.

Let me share with you some recent changes in our culture, in order to underline the urgency of the time because of the speed with which the changes are taking place.

I am generally going to follower a chronological path, beginning about almost 15 years ago.



The following is a quotation is from a previous political campaign:

"I believe that marriage is the union between a man and a woman. Now, for me as a Christian . . . it is also a sacred union. God's in the mix."

Would it surprise you to know that the above statement was made by Barak Obama during the 2008 campaign? I can't tell you whether that was Obama's belief then that changed or whether it was said for political expediency. The point is the "correct" thing to say in 2007 for someone running for President was the tradition view of marriage. (Quote from David Axelrod's book Believer: My Forty Years in Politics).

We could spend time talking about Chick-fil-A. In 2012, the founder of the popular business was asked by a reporter about his feelings about marriage.

I believe the answer was known, and the question was almost certainly to start a controversy, as it is difficult to imagine that as a normal question in an interview.

As a result, tremendous public backlash and protest erupted because Dan Cathy not only expressed a belief in a traditional understanding of marriage, but Chick-fil-A had contributed to organizations committed to that understanding. The business continues to have to fight negative press on a regular basis. Just do a google search for Chick-fil-A LGBTW and read the way the headlines are stated.

Brandon Eich is the inventor of the Javascript program language. He was one of the cofounders of Mozilla. In March 2014, he became the CEO of Mozilla but was forced to resign after only 11 days once his opposition to same-sex marriage was discovered.

Interestingly both the Chick-fil-A controversy and Eich began before the Obergefell decision made same-sex marriage legal in 2015.

In 2018, University of Iowa deregistered InterVarsity as an official student group because of IV's practice of requiring leaders to agree with its statement of faith. This past week, the 8th Circuit Court of Appeals ruled against the University of Iowa calling its decision to deregister the Christian student group as one of the most obvious examples of discrimination that it has ever seen.

In 2019 a Pennsylvania municipality held a Drag-Queen story hour at a local library. Several people signed a petition in opposition to the idea and to the use of public funds for it. People who supported the story time began to scrutinize those who signed the petition. It turns out that one woman was the wife a public-school principal.

As a result of the negative attention that this generated, the local school board felt a need to release a number of statements about how all were welcome at school and that there were not discriminatory practices of policies at the school. Some were not satisfied and pressure was put on the principal to disavow his wife's positions. The PA Family Institute was able to get him a religious liberty accommodation, but I find the fact he was being pressured in this way to be troubling (Story recounted by Jeremy Samek, esq. who is Sr. Counsel PA Family Institute).

In 2020, Neil Golightly was the Chief Communications Officer for Boeing. In 1987, he wrote an article arguing that women should not be in combat. Despite the fact that by 2020 he said he no longer believed that, he was forced to resign because of an article he wrote 33 years prior.

Op-Ed Op-Ed column writer and cartoonist, Tim Kreider, has written about this situation. He calls this epidemic "outrage porn."

"So many letters to the editor and comments on the internet have this . . . tone of thrilled vindication: these are people who have been vigilantly on the lookout for something to be offended by, and found it... Obviously, some part of us loves feeling 1) right and 2) wronged. But outrage is like a lot of things that feel good but, over time, devour us from the inside out. Except it's even more insidious than most vices because we don't even consciously acknowledge that it's a pleasure. We prefer to think of it as a disagreeable but fundamentally healthy reaction to negative stimuli, like pain or nausea, rather than admit that it's a shameful kick we eagerly indulge again and again. It is outrage porn selected specifically to pander to our impulse to judge and punish, to get us off on righteous indignation." (From Tim Kreider's book, We Learn Nothing: Essays and Cartoons).

I think Kreider's point that we love to feel 1) right and 2) wronged helps to explain much of the violence in



2020-2021 from the riots and protests of every political stripe from Antifa to Jan 6. It is scary what we can justify when we are sure we are right and are convinced we have been wronged.

I remember the debates in 1992 over the book, *Heather Has Two Mommies*. It had been written a few years earlier and began disappearing from public libraries.

The publisher offered free copies to the first 500 institutions that said their copy was missing. Within days they had 500 requests. This created a public debate about the free access to information and ideas.

The conclusion of that debate was the attitude that Americans don't censor or essentially burn books that we disagree with. Fast forward to March 2021, when Amazon decided it would no longer sell Ryan Anderson's book, *When Harry Became Sally: Responding With Compassion to the Transgender Moment*. I have found that book to be a thoughtful and sensitive approach to the subject matter. Yet, this book was censored, pulled from the Amazon library.

Let me be clear, as a business, Amazon has every right to decide what merchandise it will carry. But with its enormous size, its decision (arguably intentionally) impacts culture. Since Amazon sells well over 50% of all books sold in America, when a book is rejected by Amazon, the impact is chilling. If the No. 1 book retailer will not carry a book from this perspective, what are the odds that this or other publishers will publish anything remotely similar in the future?

In 2018, a high school teacher named Mr. Kluge was forced to resign his position, because the school insisted on teacher utilizing student's preferred pronouns. He did not feel that he could and believed he had an agreement with the school board to call students only by their last names. He argued that the school district reneged on its deal, which led to his resignation.

This past week a federal judge ruled against him. The ruling stated that the school district "could not accommodate Mr. Kluge's religious beliefs without sustaining undue hardship," because it was believed that his referring to students by last names only

interfered with the school district's mission of providing a welcoming environment.

Whoever gets to define the terms, usually wins the debate.

Here we are in the land where the first inalienable right is the right to free speech, but you can now be forced to resign or face termination over pronouns.

I am not sure what you think, but I find this all very disturbing.

What's the point? What should we do?

Realize the TIME

Be Wayne Casner. Look around you and know what time it is.

Jesus told his disciples: "All this I have told you so that you will not fall away. 2 They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, the time is coming when anyone who kills you will think they are offering a service to God. 3 They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me. 4 I have told you this, so that when their time comes you will remember that I warned you about them.

Pray for our country and the world: For God to have mercy and bring revival.

I believe God is going to give us revival or we are going to face being canceled in one form or another. Every fiber of my being says this is going to get worse. Unless there is revival, and perhaps even if there is revival, things will not change. It will not matter who is in the Whitehouse or who takes, loses, or keeps Congress.

Pray for discernment.

It seems to me that we have 2 options. We can Fight the Flood

Is 59.19 says that when the enemy comes in like a flood, the LORD will raise up a standard against him.

Most of my life, I have been in a church that says fight the fight, don't yield an inch in the fight against culture. There is a part of me that is still there, but recently, it has occurred to me that may this isn't the only choice.

There is another story in the Bible - Noah's Ark.



Float the Flood

In this view, we don't spend as much time and energy fighting the current that we are experiencing but, instead, we at some level, acknowledge that we have lost the battle (even though God will win the war). We prepare to survive the flood. We build a counter-culture community that stands as a witness to the cancel culture around us.

Pray for discernment. We need discernment to know if this is time for sandbags or an ark?

Prepare to be cancelled.

Another part of Realizing the Time is to be ready for what is coming. In our passage today, Jesus did not instruct his disciples to "fight the fight." He told his disciples to be ready when they kick you out of the main institutions of culture (synagogue). He told them to be ready to be canceled. Why should we expect something different?

Prepare others for what is coming.

If you were a Christian in Germany before the rise of Naziism, and you knew it was coming, how would you raise your kids, or be involved in the raising of kids?

Be involved in preparing kids and young people now for what may be coming. Perhaps the kids are yours, those in your family, or those around you.

Some ways we could do that here are the afterschool program, volunteering for youth ministry or being a mentor to a young person.

Remember that you don't get to cancel anyone.

In this community, canceling people has been canceled.

We don't get to cancel anyone, because we were not canceled when we deserved to be.

As followers of Christ, we don't get to cancel anyone, no matter who much we disagree with them or how sure we are that they are wrong. Christians ought to be the least offendable, most loving people on the planet.

Personally, I have some hang-ups with the pronoun issue right now. At some point in our future, perhaps

we can talk about it together. I don't agree with many of the arguments being made; I certainly do not think people should be able to lose their jobs over the issue, and yet if using someone's preferred pronouns allows me to continue to relate to them, allows me to try to share Jesus, I will use their pronouns and do what I can to keep that bridge open.

God has not called me to fix other people. In verses 8 of our passage today, Jesus said that when the Holy Spirit comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment. It is the Spirit's job to prove the world to be wrong, not mine. I have enough on my plate.

There is a story that the London Times once ran an article asking "What is Wrong with the World?" G. K. Chesterton responded, "Dear Sir: Regarding your article 'What's Wrong with the World?' I am. Yours truly."

Who would Jesus cancel? I cannot think of anyone.

Rejoice, the Lord is King

Rejoice that the Prince of this world already stands condemned (verse 11)

Rejoice that our King is on his throne.

If you get canceled, give thanks that you have been counted worthy of suffering with Christ.

Give thanks that the one whom we tried to cancel has instead canceled our sins, our offenses and our death, and every tool and power of the enemy.

At the beginning of John 16, Jesus says, "All this I have told you so that you will not fall away."

At the end of the chapters, he encourages us: "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

Amen.

