

READ Psalm 103:6-14

There are a number of qualities about our culture that are not praise worthy by any stretch of the imagination, but there are few that can cause more damage to the individual lives of people like the cancel culture that has become prevalent. Cancel culture is the practice of attacking, boycotting, and/or ostracizing individuals or businesses because of something that has either been said or done. The misstep could be an actual crime such as sexual misconduct or it could be something such as affirming the traditional understanding of marriage as being between a man and woman. The latter example can be seen in the case of Chick-Fil-A. Founder Truett Cathey was found guilty in the public eye of homophobic beliefs and behavior for taking the public stand of affirming the traditional understanding of marriage. Many within our society have tried on numerous occasions to call into existence a boycott of CFA, but such a boycott has failed to materialize at this point in time.

Other cancellations have found themselves in the public spotlight as people such as actor Bill Cosby, performer R. Kelly, and Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein have been ostracized and publicly disgraced for their sexually related trespasses. But the cancellations are not only reserved for the well-known and famous. Regular everyday folks can also be subject to the cancel culture if they dare to question the mainstream logic of large portions of our society. People have been known to lose their jobs if they state the wrong opinion or belief in a public way on social media platforms such as Twitter. Athletes are often the targets of cancel culture following public victories as certain people will search deep into their histories in order to find some misstep from years past.

While the goal of those participating in cancel culture is to hold people accountable for their perceived mistakes and sins, the reality is there are some targets of cancel culture who have realized their mistakes, made apologies, and tried to do better from that point on. However, that simply is not enough for those who belong to such a culture because many are out for blood. They want to make an example of anyone they can for their misgivings and mistakes. They want to make an example of these people in order to deter anyone else from making similar mistakes. There simply is very little forgiveness in the hearts of those who support cancel culture.

Now compare that with what took place during the sad circumstances surrounding the death of 27 year old Botham Jean. In 2018, Botham, a brother in Christ from all accounts, was sitting on his couch in Dallas more than two years ago when a police officer named Amber Guyger entered his residence believing it to be her own. She believed Botham was an intruder, and fatally shot him moments later. Guyger was arrested, charged with manslaughter, and following a trial she received a murder conviction that came with a sentence of ten years in prison.

While this situation certainly had the nation's attention because it involved a white police officer killing an unarmed black man, a most extraordinary moment took place that shifted the attention towards the younger brother of Botham, Brandt. During his victim statement following the conviction, Brandt spoke of the anger that he felt for what happened to his brother. He was broken over his life being senselessly taken, but he also spoke of growing past those feelings of hatred based upon Guyger expressing great remorse for what took place. Guyger had previously stated, *"I'm so sorry. I never wanted to take an innocent person's life. I wish he was the one with the gun that killed me."* In response to this showing of remorse, Brandt stated, *"I don't want to say twice or for the 100th time how much you have taken from us. I think you know that. But I just...I hope you go to God with all of the guilt, all the bad things you have done in the past...I know if you are truly sorry, I can speak for myself I forgive you, and I know if you go to God and ask Him, He will forgive you."* Brandt then stepped down from the stand and embraced his brother's killer in a moment that surely brought tears to those present and those who have since watched the scene.

Consider just how much these two attitudes differ from one another. One attitude is almost seemingly looking for something with which to use to hurt someone else even when they themselves are not the victim of that person's behavior...even if that person has since shown remorse and made change from those previous actions, behaviors, or mindsets. The other was personally harmed through the needless taking of his brother's life, and yet he expresses a willingness to forgive that person and encourages that person to seek forgiveness from the One who will be the true judge...God. What separates these two polar opposite mindsets? Surely it is a focus on God, His characteristics as can be found in **Psalms 103**, and a desire to display the character of His Son within our lives.

This year, we have focused on giving great effort in learning and implementing characteristics and behaviors that stand in opposition to the world around us. Where the world is unbelieving, we strive to believe in God. Where the world is unstable, we seek the peace that God provides. Where the world is dark, we seek to live in the light of God. These thoughts and many more have been our considerations, and I hope they have been of benefit for you as we seek to draw closer to God and move further away from the corrupt nature of this world. As we conclude this series of studies, I want to lastly consider the great need for us to be a forgiving people in an unforgiving world. Grace, mercy, and forgiveness are often sorely lacking in our culture, but this has been true for every culture that has come before our own...even the culture Jesus lived in.

This morning I want for us focus on learning the great need for our willingness to forgive others from His teachings in **Matthew 18:21-35**. This parable of Jesus, which is greatly tied into the previous verses of chapter 18 will not only going us insight into the need for forgiveness, but it will also teach us how we can be a forgiving people, and what will be the consequence of our unwillingness to do so. Let's read the text and consider just how important of a role our willingness to forgive plays into our own mindset and God's graciousness towards us.

Learning Forgiveness From Jesus (Matthew 18:21-35)

A. "How many times must I forgive..." (vv.21,22)

1. Our main text for this morning begins with a question from the every outspoken Peter, "*Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother and sister who sins against me? As many as seven times?*" The prompting of this question can certainly be seen in the previous few verses where Jesus gives instructions concerning how they were to deal with a brother who had sinned against them. Following up that teaching, Peter asks this question, and he does so seemingly to show just how gracious he would be in that situation. Jewish rabbis of the time taught that forgiving someone more than three times was unnecessary considering what was said in **Amos 1:3-13** which speaks of God giving Israel's enemies three chances to repent before sending punishment against them. In their minds, forgiving someone three times was plenty of chances for them to figure things out.
2. Possibly in an attempt to show himself as being even more than doubly generous, Peter asked if it was good for him to forgive others even seven times. However, Jesus even goes far beyond that by stating he should forgive seventy times seven. Does this mean we ought to keep a record book every person's wrongs against us so we can cut off the forgiveness after the 490th time of seeking such? Of course that is not Jesus's point. He is using exaggerated, hyperbolic language to emphasize His point, but he also goes on to build upon this teaching by offering up a story parable to solidify this important teaching.

B. The Unforgiving Forgiven Servant (vv.23-34)

1. Jesus uses this opportunity to give further teaching concerning what was expected of those who belonged to the kingdom of heaven. He compares that kingdom to a king who has decided it is time to settle accounts with his servants. One servant comes before him who

owes him 10,000 talents. I believe this is further use by Jesus of exaggerated/hyperbolic language because our understanding of this amount of debt would leave us reading this text as this servant owing his master 200,000 years of wages. This amount is calculated when we consider a single talent is 6,000 denarii which would amount to 20 years worth of wages multiplied by 10,000 would bring us to the 200,000 years of wages number.

2. Clearly this is a debt that simply could not be repaid by this servant, and he responds by falling on his face and begging for patience on the part of his master. He simply wants more time in order for him to pay back what he owed. Yet, what we see is the master having extreme compassion on the slave by not simply giving the slave time. No, he instead decides to completely forgive the slave all of his debt. He shows extreme mercy and grace towards this servant by going far and beyond what the servant asked, was owed, or deserved.
3. This parable is certainly looking promising at this point, but it quickly takes a turn as that same servant turns around and accosts his fellow servant by grabbing and choking him for a debt that was owed him. How much was this forgiven servant owed? That answer would be a measly 100 denarii, the equivalent of only 3-4 months wages. This second servant does exactly as the initial servant had done towards his master. He falls on his face and begs for patients. Yet, the forgiven servant was not willing to extend patience and much less forgiveness of the debt. He takes this second servant and throws him in prison until he could pay back what was owed.
4. Those who are witness to this episode go and report to the master who is infuriated by what has taken place. He summons the forgiven servant before him and rebukes him as a wicked servant. He was shown mercy and forgiveness and yet he wasn't willing to extend the same to his own fellow servant. This servant was no longer forgiven of his debt and was thrown into prison and tortured until he could repay his debt which we know would be impossible. Though using hyperbolic language, Jesus's point ought to be seen as abundantly clear. To those who have been forgiven much...much is expected for them to forgive.

C. "So also my heavenly Father will do to you..." (v.35)

1. This was especially to be understood considering the forgiveness that God offers to us. The master in the story is surely representative of God. He has forgiven us of a debt we simply cannot repay. Our rebellion against Him leaves us helpless and hopeless to repay the debt by our strength and means for everything belongs to Him as the Creator. We as the created have nothing to give that would make up for our debt. Yet, it is His incomparable grace and mercy that has led Him to offer us forgiveness of that insurmountable debt. He is willing to go to incredible lengths for our forgiveness which was also illustrated in the just prior parable of the one lost sheep going astray from the other 99. **(18:10-14)**
2. There is therefore an expectation for us, as forgiven people, to be willing to forgive others of their sins and mistakes against us. If God is willing to extend forgiveness to people so far below Him and undeserving, how much more ought we be willing to extend forgiveness to those who are our equals and who are actually people we ought to consider more highly than ourselves **(Philippians 2:1-4)**? In this we see the failure of the servant. He was prideful and arrogant, which goes back to the beginning of the chapter **(18:1-4)**. He dreadfully failed to forgive his peer for what amounts to little when his greater master had forgiven him for what was a truly enormous amount. He sadly failed to give grace when he had been shown such great grace. For this he was held accountable by his master, and for such prideful failures on our part we will be held accountable, as well.

Application Thoughts

A. Pride is the ultimate roadblock to offering forgiveness to others.

1. As can be seen within the context of our main text, Jesus is working against the pride and arrogance that can rightfully be identified as the root of every issue we face in this life. Pride had moved the disciples to ask Jesus who would be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, and He responds by teaching the need for humility like a child. Pride is also seen in the ordeal that is described in **vv.15-20** involving an unwillingness to repent of a sin committed against a brother. Everywhere we look in this chapter, Jesus is emphasizing the need for humility in the lives of those who are a part of His people.
2. It should not surprise us then that pride would be a major factor in this story. Here the servant begs for time and patience. His master considerably humbles himself in forgiving the debt entirely, but then the servant's true self is made evident in him turning around and demanding a fellow servant pay back what he is owed without showing the same humility, compassion, and patience. Why would someone be willing to behave in this way?
3. Surely it is because that person is filled with pride believing he is definitively entitled to something. *"How dare you not pay ME back what you owe?" "How dare you hurt or offend me?"* The prideful person sees himself as being owed a certain level of respect from everyone around him, and it is a great offense for him to be robbed of such. If this is how we see ourselves then forgiveness is going to be far from our minds because others have simply failed miserably in what they surely must know is expected. They have failed and don't deserve forgiveness for what they have done, and I won't be granting forgiveness until the offenders come and meet me on my terms.

B. Our unwillingness to forgive is a detriment to our own well-being.

1. This thought comes from a couple of different perspectives. First, our unwillingness to forgive is simply unhealthy for our mental and spiritual well-being. Those who are unwilling to forgive the mistakes and sins of others are often left with a toxic mindset that not only is detrimental to their mental state of mind, but it also leaves them in a place of sin. Again, pride and arrogance are often the root causes of this unwillingness, and we know the sinful position in which those mindsets leave us, but they also often lead to vengeful, begrudging, and bitter mindsets. These mindsets leave us unable to live in harmony with others. They cause us to be callous, cold, and unloving. I know the whole debate rages concerning whether or not we should forgive those who refuse to express remorse, but I believe that misses the important point of our need to be willing to forgive and not hold grudges or bitterness against others. Though others might not express any remorse for what they might have done against us, we must be the type of people who are not going to allow the pride of others to cause us to move towards their type of ungodly mindset by becoming callous, cold, and unloving.
2. Brandt Jean obviously did not want to be that type of person for he said in his response and growth during the ordeal surrounding his brother's death, *"It's just forced me to improve my humility and freed me from anxiety."* These thoughts must surely have found their motivation from what Paul wrote in **Ephesians 4:31,32**, *"Let all bitterness, anger and wrath, shouting and slander be removed from you, along with all malice. And be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another, just as God also forgave you in Christ."*
3. Our willingness to forgive and show compassion allows us to be greater imitators of God (**Ephesians 5:1**), and it also allows us to experience the forgiveness of God which ought to serve as a motivation for our willingness to forgive others. This is a point that Jesus certainly did not beat around the bush to make in this text. He clearly expresses in **Matthew 18:35** that our unwillingness to forgive others as God has forgiven us will lead to horrible condemnation and

punishment. Brothers and sisters, humility is demanded if we are going to be able to survive in a world filled with fallible people who might cause us harm. Not only will we not survive by having a jaded mindset, but we will also fail to experience the forgiveness that each of us so desperately need from our heavenly Father.

C. An unwillingness to forgive leaves us falling short of Jesus's own example of forgiveness.

1. These strong and difficult teachings are certainly a struggle for us considering our own weaknesses, but we can gain encouragement in our striving to follow these teachings by remembering that Jesus first set the example for us when it comes to forgiveness. We would do well to remember that even as He was hanging upon the cross, our Lord said, *"Father, forgive them, because they do not know what they are doing."* (Luke 23:34)
2. Our Lord, who was offended and harmed in the greatest sense possible as deity in the flesh being murdered, having His life unlawfully taken as an innocent person by His own creation, was ready for His Father to forgive them for their sins, and some would in fact have this sin and every sin forgiven later on in the book of Acts at the preaching of Peter. If this is the mindset of God then we must realize the necessity of having the same mindset. This was Brandt Jean's desire as he said, *"I want people to have the heart that God has."* Anything less on our part leaves us falling short of imitating Jesus's own example in our lives.

Main Point/Conclusion: Our willingness to forgive others is the key to a healthy mindset and to experiencing the blessing of receiving God's forgiveness for our own sins.

In a world that often seems so dead-set against extending mercy, grace, and forgiveness...we are called by God to be a people defined by mercy, grace, and forgiveness. We are called to be a people who shock the world as Brandt Jean did as he forgave and hugged his brother's killer. We are to be a people who refuse to hold onto grudges and bitterness towards our fellow man who has wronged us slightly when we have wronged God greatly and still been granted mercy, grace, and forgiveness. The evil one desires for our destruction through an unwillingness to follow the example of Jesus, but we must resist him and seek to have the same heart of God. This isn't to say that practicing such grace will be easy, but I am confident we can all attain to such a lofty goal through the strength God provides. May our gracious spirits shine in this dark world and lead others towards the example of our King who has so lovingly forgiven each and every one of us.