

postmodern breakfast food



I had the blessing of spending some time at Zondervan this morning with around 200 others to hear Brian McLaren and Rob Bell share some thoughts. The following is a bit of a loose transcript, and I'd like to stress that the only real "quotes" are in quotes (hmm... how clever of me). The hosts from Zondervan welcomed everyone, read from a Psalm, and then asked questions that the guys responded to.

There are some great nuggets in here... I'd love to hear what stands out to you.

Regarding living the "Jesus way of life" in today's world...

Paraphrases from Rob: I think that central to the church is the need for every generation to ask, "What does it look like for us to be church here and now?" We've been handed this thing... what does the Kingdom of God look like to explode in this place?

Paraphrases from Brian: I have this quote in the back of the book by G.K. Chesterton...

How can we keep the artist discontented with his pictures while preventing him from being vitally discontented with his art? How can we make a man always dissatisfied with his work, yet always keep working? How can we make sure that the portrait painter will throw the portrait out the window instead of taking the natural and more human course of throwing the sitter out of [the] window?

And then I speak about the tension of always being discontented with our portraits of orthodoxy, never (out of frustration) throw the Subject of our portrait out the window. Many times we have this picture of Jesus in our brain and we start to paint it, but then we get frustrated and we're tempted to throw Jesus out the window.

Rob: (adding) "Which brings up an interesting point that every fresh and original thought you think you have – somebody smarter a long time ago in Europe said it."

Regarding how Brian hopes pastors will respond to his book...

Paraphrases from Brian: I sense everywhere I go – and not just among young followers of Christ, but even from older followers – that our past has been divided. I'm hoping someone says, "This is what I've been thinking, too." If we want unity, it's not about just emphasizing our common ground... it's also about emphasizing our differences and seeing them as gifts we get to bring to one another. I want to be post-Protestant... we spent so much time building distinctives in order to define who we weren't... that made us feel better than others, which leads to pride, which then takes us away from grace.

Regarding a thought from Rob's book on freeing Jesus from the religion that's been built around Him...

Paraphrases from Rob: "I think that in many ways what bonds us the resurrected Christ." I've been so surprised during the times I've had a chance to lead pastors in communion how many of them have never taken bread and the cup outside of their traditions.

Isn't this about the resurrection? Is Christ put on display or not? Often in our churches all the great things about Christ become defined as, "So, are you with us on the next building campaign or not?"

Regarding some thoughts on putting Jesus back in the center...

Paraphrases from Rob: As a leader, something needs to happen inside of us first. Ask yourself: "Do I have more wonder and awe than when I first started? Have I been moved to innocence? Am I more passionate about the Christ who saved me today than years ago when it happened? Do I have the backbone to let the Kingdom of God happen in me?" We often try to move people to a place of "shalom" that isn't the dominant reality in our lives.

Regarding making disciples "for the sake of the world"...

Paraphrases from Brian: I think [Dallas Willard](#) and [Richard Foster](#) have done an incredible job of bringing back to our attention that "converts and disciples are not the same thing." Making disciples is not accidental but the main focus of our work. Maybe it's time to ask your board of elders, "How can my job be adjusted in the next several years so that my primary job is to model Jesus Christ instead of lead a religious organization?"

So when we speak of making disciples "for the sake of the world" we are speaking of the reality that the church is not to keep to itself or live in isolation. The church exists so the world may know God's love and mercy. I love the phrase I heard that "our sins are too heavy to carry, too real to hide, and too deep to undo." We say that, but are surprised when someone acts like a jerk to us.

One of the terrible con's of the religious right is the focus on the sins other people do that we don't (as if to legitimize ours). It's unfortunate, but often if you want to find some judgmental people, go to church. Ironically, I think you will find much less of that in the gay community, for instance.

There's this dominant idea in many churches that one day we will all leave the earth. You can justify the theology of evacuation with the Bible... you can justify a lot of stupid things with the Bible, for that matter... "I know it sounds crazy to say that God actually loves the world... that [God so loved the world](#)... I know it's radical to say that [God loves birds and flowers](#)... but I heard it from Someone that I trust."

Regarding the emphasis on why knowing our identity now is so important...

Paraphrases from Rob: There's an interesting insight from the book of Ephesians... the first couple of chapters contain no commands. It doesn't tell you to do anything, but instead it tells you who you are. Then a few chapters in there is this gearshift as if to say, "Now that you know who you are here's what to do..."

"People have intuitively rejected shame-based theologies." Somehow they know it's not right. "I've met people who for them found becoming a Christian loaded them down with stuff..." Jesus critiqued this, saying, "You load people down with burdens they can hardly carry, and you yourselves will not lift one finger to help them."

Paraphrases from Brian: I know this woman who is a single mom of three kids, each from a different dad. She came to Christ some time ago, and just recently told me, "When I became a follower of Christ I wanted to get myself into

the church as much I could." After a work trip Egypt this summer, she reached a turning point and said, "God wants me to get out there and make a difference."

Regarding how the church uses the Bible in a changing world...

NOTE - the host quoted Brian's book: "It's no surprise then that biblical Christians have thrived when we've used the Bible with the goal of becoming good people who, because we follow Jesus, do good works in God's good world. And we have languished and wandered when we have used the Bible as a weapon to threaten others, as a tool to intimidate others and prove them wrong, as a shortcut to being know-it-alls."

Paraphrases from Brian: "We need to read it more... out loud." We were just talking last night about how sometimes people take the Bible out of context through nice little devotionals. Jokingly, we said how you could argue that the Bible is the disorganized, raw version of "Our Daily Bread." We need to "read it to try to get the big narrative flow... to realize the story hasn't ended yet and we are still a part of it."

The best Bible study I've ever been a part of was when we read the Pentateuch together. We would take the three or so chapters and read them out loud together in unison. We wouldn't stop for comments – just read. There was something about it that was rather special. Then we'd say, "Okay, what do you want to talk about?" I always used to read my Bible in "suitable chunks for preaching," looking for the next angle or my points I would share. But there was something about this study... like when we read from Numbers how people spoke against Moses and then God struck them down (which I think, by the way, is a great verse for pastors). Then later when you read that Moses struck the rock in anger and God prevents him from entering into the Promised Land... you get something out of that maybe you would have missed.

Paraphrases from Rob: I would take issue with the question, I think. I don't know that we're supposed to "use the Bible." I think the better question is "How do we get caught up in what the Bible is caught up in?" I'm working on a campaign against thinking of the Bible as an "owner's manual" – you only take an owner's manual out when the toaster breaks. I want to know "where is our story in that story?" What's the movement? Where is what God is doing here happening to us?

I love the idea that "we affirm everything the Bible affirms" - that's it's useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in all righteousness. Some people have a particular buzzword they are looking for you to say about the Bible or theology and when you don't say it they get angry. Many will say that in everything the point is the Bible – the point *isn't* the Bible – *the point is the resurrected Christ*. The Bible can become something we get our hands around and start to use to draw lines because we serve a God with an unpronounceable name and a mysterious personality.

Regarding how they respond to critics who don't agree with their thoughts...

Paraphrases from Brian: You can be doing everything right and hear all the criticism. You need to ask yourself, "How can I come through this and become *better – not bitter?* Become *sweeter – not sour?*" I love a prayer I discovered some time ago called "A Prayer For My Enemies." It helps me to see critics as God's gift to keep my ego from inflating. Sometimes critics are just carnal friends in disguise. I've read the prayer everyday.

Paraphrases from Rob: When you receive criticism, you have to remember that you've thought through and digested your ideas and let them loose in your community after a long process. What happens if you try to engage a person if you've had several voices and authors speaking into you that they haven't? We try to invite people into the journey with us by pointing them to the resources we've had the blessing of being a part of. Then after they read them, if they still disagree with you, well... then I don't know what you do.

Regarding the concept of bringing the Kingdom of heaven to earth...

Paraphrases from Rob: A lot of people in the church see life as trying to get somewhere else. But when you read the Torah and Jesus' teachings we see more written about bringing the Kingdom to earth. "Your Kingdom come, Your will be done," and so on. The concept of the afterlife was a new concept... bringing the Kingdom is about doing the kinds of things Jesus talks about – where there is suffering, you do something about it.

I don't know if any of your congregations have heard of this thing called "financial debt?" We have so much of that in our area that we are trying to raise up counselors to help people become financially free... the issue of AIDS will impact the church in major ways in that it's consuming Africa and on its way through Asia. "A Christian is someone who resists the marriage of hell on earth and asks, 'How can I bring heaven to earth?'"

Regarding what it means to not be hostile towards others who are different...

Paraphrases from Brian: I was on a ferry and looking for someone to share a cab with to the airport once we docked. This wasn't motivated by anything spiritual... I was just being cheap. I met a man who agreed, and asked, "So, what do you do for a living?" I said, "Actually, I'm a pastor." (I don't know what I always say "actually" when I answer that question.) He said, "Oh, I'm a Jew. I was watching some of your TV shows last night. Why do you let them do that?" He went on to share that he grew up in Iowa and his family was the only Jewish one in the community. "I have a bad taste in my mouth about Christians," he said. "They either ignore you or tell you that you're going to burn in hell."

We've created an environment where the only way Christians can relate to others is to tell them "You're going to burn in hell." Think about that.

"As a follower of Jesus I am called to love my neighbor." I don't like it when people who are trying to market something try to be my friend to advance their quota... or when people have a list they go down until they find something they disagree with about my life so that they can correct me. I don't like that, and I would guess you don't either. Guess what? Neither does the world.

I tell people, "Look for the religiously, socially, ethnically, sexually 'different' person." Look for that "different" person around you, and go towards them. Enter their world with acceptance and love and help them to get to know Christianity through that. If you are white, you have all the things that go along with "white privilege" – but you also have "white responsibility." Bottom line – "if you are a Christian, you move towards the 'others' you come into contact with."

Regarding what they appreciate about each other...

Paraphrases from Rob: "I'll go first! Brian is kind to the very end. When you are smart there are often a lot of 'other things' that go with that, but Brian is kind... flesh and blood kind."

He also knows the importance of history... I was in South Africa and heard that Brian had been there. He took the Dutch people through their own theological history... many who had ancestors responsible for apartheid... and it melted them.

I've been in Brian's house and I've seen him have dinner with his family... *he loves having dinner with his family!* I think that's what makes his voice so powerful. It's most important to live this out with the people you see everyday and who know you best. "That, to me, is more important than anything he says or writes."

Paraphrases from Brian: "He's just wild and he has found a way to not get domesticated by the church and ministry. I imagine that's not easy... there's this wildness that gets beaten out of us in the ministry... of course, the creativity Rob has would be scary were it not so in the yoke of Jesus Christ... his legacy... the impact of his church... is going to be so significant."

I don't know if this is still the case, but I went to his web site when it first started and couldn't find his name anywhere. I wondered if I had the right church or not. That's the kind of community that is. In fact, when I visited I asked several staff, "How many are in this church?" They all responded, "Well, we have around 400 *committed to the community*." In a world where pastors like to over inflate their numbers, I like this idea better.

The host thanked both men, then asked Brian to close the time in prayer.

Everyone went home with a nice goodie bag filled with [A Generous Orthodoxy](#), [Velvet Elvis](#), [The Leadership Secrets Of Billy Graham](#), a full TNIV Bible, [No Perfect People Allowed](#) (audio), [The Lion, The Witch, And The Wardrobe](#), and a cool parchment style bag with a book on archeological Bible studies. This was worth the free price of admission... not to mention the apple I took with me.