

Candidate Week Event Report – Men’s Gathering

The men of RBC descended on the campus Monday night to meet Senior Pastor Candidate Jason Swanson. The meeting, originally scheduled to be held in Modular B, had to be moved to Modular A since Modular B was not large enough to hold the 50+ men in attendance. The meeting began, and after twenty minutes of prayer and praising God, Elder Mike Peay introduced Jason.

He began by sharing his testimony and describing some of his experiences in Papua New Guinea among the Siawi people. He explained that he grew up in a non-religious, single-parent home. It wasn’t until Jr. High and High School, Jason said, that he finally understood the depth of his sin and need for forgiveness. After being asked by his church family to lead the youth ministry, he started to teach and take the students on missions’ trips. One such trip was to Papua New Guinea, which Jason described as life-changing. God used this trip in Jason’s life to develop a love for tribal missions and Papua New Guinea in particular. Jason then met his wife Shannon, who herself had recently returned from her own mission’s trip to Papua New Guinea. They married and began to train as a couple with New Tribes Missions to become a full-time missionary couple.

Jason described having the choice to start his own church plant or take over an existing, failing church plant. He and Shannon chose the failing plant. Jason mentioned being the ninth missionary family to move into the tribe. There was no church and no concept of the real gospel. It was, Jason said, “a missionary graveyard. By no means was it easy, but by God’s grace I wouldn’t take back any of that time.” Jason took nine months, teaching five days a week, to lay out the basics of the Christian faith and then presented the gospel. The entire village, with the exception of perhaps 20 people, believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. For the next ten years Jason continued to teach 5 days a week through the New Testament, raising up Elders in the church along the way. Eventually, the qualified men of the church began to teach the younger generation while Jason provided discipleship and pastoral oversight.

Throughout his testimony, Jason stressed the importance of discipleship in his life as well as in the lives of others. “You can’t have a pastor who all he does is preach,” Jason said, “he has to shepherd. It [his ministry] has to have feet and walk.” He shared a story about discipling some of the Siawi men. He mentioned that the Siawi men, in addition to being polygamists, would routinely mistreat and beat their wives. Some would even take their machetes to them so that their wife would need stitches the next day. Through the course of discipling these men, Jason said he would ask them three questions as they met together throughout the week: have you been in the Word this week, how has your prayer life been, and how did you treat your wife this week? Jason described how he prayed both for himself and the men of his tribe and he saw major transformation. Two months later the men were only using the blunt side of the machete instead of the blade. Hey, this was progress! They were making steps towards godliness. He recognized that God was working and sanctification was happening. Eventually, the men stopped beating their wives entirely! God had truly done a work in their lives!

Soon after Jason began to realize that his time as the tribe’s main teacher was over. His four children were getting older and the Siawi church was becoming self-sufficient. For the final two years of their ministry, Jason would go over the lessons with the church Elders and allow them to teach the people. He described a time when, during a study on the book of Revelation, a particularly tough question was asked of one of the new tribal teachers. Jason wondered if this church leader had enough training to handle such a difficult question. It turns out he did and he was able to explain the complex answer from memory. Jason saw God’s confirmation that his work was coming to a close.

After summing up the families return to the states and describing his education at Master's Seminary, Jason fielded some difficult questions from the men. One even quipped afterward, "I'm glad I'm not Jason!" Some of those questions and answers are reported below.

Elder Steve Norris called the meeting to a close at 8:30 PM. Jason stood and prayed the gathering to a close. Some of the men hung around to chat with Jason for another 20 minutes. Many others wanted a quick handshake. One man in attendance commented, "I think his experience in PNG is not as irrelevant as I thought it might be." Another said, "After hearing [Jason] speak I think it's evident that God has called him here. I think he's an answer to prayer in the sense that it's not Jason looking for a job or RBC just looking for a pastor, I think it's a true calling."

Overall, it was a great time for the men of Ranch Baptist Church and we continue to look forward to what God is going to do in our midst!

Reported by Doug Schell

SUMMARY OF QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:

Question: Speaking of relationships, our most important one is our relationship with the Lord. What have you found useful or beneficial in your relationship with the Lord to grow and be healthy?

Jason: Excellent question. The Lord is what I depend on. When you are doing tribal missions, you can't go work extra hours somewhere to earn more money, you depend on the Lord. How do you do a baptism when the people believe the water has power? Or someone is paralyzed because they took communion? So, it threw me to my knees and I spent a lot of time in the Word. (It was about this time in the exchange that this reported noticed Jason's face starting to get red. Readers might be interested to know that this happens to Jason when he gets passionate about a subject). I also wanted to go to seminary to improve my knowledge of God and his word. I know that knowledge does not equal godliness and knowledge does not equal spiritual maturity. But I went to masters because I wanted to be taught by guys who had shepherd's hearts.

Question: What are your thoughts about delegation?

Jason: When it comes to my family I'm a bulldog and time with them is not something I'm going to compromise on. I also don't believe I have all the answers and the guys on staff know everyone, why wouldn't I use them? My motto would not be anything like the corporate CEO.

Question: You had spiritual conflicts in the jungle with the tribe, what are your thoughts on spiritual oppression here in the Temecula?

Jason: It's more visible in PNG, here it's hidden. There it's machetes, here it's difficult to see. We also have worldliness and materialism, there's busyness and people doing a million different things. You teach the Word and you love on people and you patiently wait for the Lord to work on them. And it wouldn't just be me, it would be all of us caring for one another.

Question: Have you had a chance to look at the assessments Pastor Rick has done? What do you think will be the biggest challenge at RBC in the next year?

Jason: Yes, I have. Trust will be a big deal. That perhaps the paradigm here was too heavy on doctrine and not heavy enough on grace, love and relationships. And those are things I'm very passionate about which needs to be a part of shepherding as well. And I'm not talking about compromising doctrine. I'm talking about graciously preaching and teaching and being applicationally oriented.

Question: So knowing the background, what would you focus on first?

Jason: Unifying the church. We need to be unified in leadership and in the body. That will happen through relationships and preaching and teaching and understanding God's standard to love one another and still not compromise on sin.

Question: Do you feel the call to come here?

Jason: Strongly. More strongly with each step of the process. Shannon loved PNG, loved the ministry, and wanted to perhaps go back to the field. I wanted to preach and teach. God has changed her heart. My kids need the interaction with other kids. Shannon needs it with other women. We've been all alone [where we live] during seminary and the kids are being tortured again [still without contact with other kids]. All of my children are excited about this church. We haven't been part of a body in a long time. Even though the assessment is scary, even though the position is daunting, everything else is so overpowering I'm very excited about the Lord's leading. The door just keeps opening wider and wider.

Question: What kind of church were you looking for?

Jason: At first a church between 200-300 people. Not a church so small that I would be wearing a million hats. I know how churches function, I've been on church staffs, I've been a missions pastor, so I do have a lot of experience watching churches function. The leadership of this church is a breath of fresh air

Question: Do you teach book by book or topical?

Jason: Definitely book by book. I'm a bible expositor. Preaching just on a verse or chapter is "murder to me." However, please know that I don't have a problem with topical preaching as long as it's expositional. I just teach book by book.

Question: If unity is the first thing you would go after, that implies there is disunity. Can you talk about that a little bit?

Jason: Some of the assessment mentioned the disunity seems to be aimed at leadership and how things were handled in the past. Any time a new guy is going to step into a Senior Pastor role, there's going to be this issue. I'm not going to do things the way Matt did. I want to get on the same page with leadership. I'm not here to upset the apple cart or wreak havoc on the church, I'm here to glorify God and honor him through the reading of the Word.

Question: Are u going to deal with sin biblically?

Jason: Yes.

Question: Do you agree with the statement of faith? Would you change or add anything?

Jason: I wouldn't change anything. It's gospel oriented which is what I think all churches should be.

Question: With your personality, how do you handle conflict?

Jason: It depends on the kind of conflict. A huge, pervasive doctrinal issue will be dealt with very strongly. If we're talking about a conflict between people I'm going to be patient and gracious and still make decisions. I would also seek wisdom from the other guys in leadership.

Question: Do you still want to be involved in PNG and take short term trips there?

Jason: Yes, I would love to go back every couple of years and take groups with me each time.

Question: What is your vision for RBC in a year from now?

Jason: To be a unified body. I don't care if numbers grow, I want to see us maturing in our faith. That we honor God and glorify Him and push forward for His glory.

Question: How do you intend to build relationships with people?

Jason: Not just on Sunday. I'll have people over to the house. We will be intentional. Shannon is gifted that way and is excited about that. She isn't going to be the women's Bible teacher or the piano player, but she will love any woman or child that comes to our house.

Question: What are your plans for the future? Do we need to be worried you will leave?

Jason: We are in this for the long haul. There are going to be hard times, God's Word talks about it. It's how He refines us. But we are excited about this being the place for us as long as God wants to keep us here. And I think our track record is that we aren't a family that gives up and runs away. And relationships are established through time. It doesn't happen overnight. So, Pastors need to stay in one place for a long time and we are committed to becoming very old. We will be here as long as the Lord enables us to be here.

Question: Are you humble enough to admit when you're wrong?

Jason: I hope so. My kids tell me I'm wrong and I have to sometimes humbly admit that they are right and ask for forgiveness.

Question: What does RBC have going for it?

Jason: Leadership, love for the Word, love for one another, the Pastors you already have, the ministries, all of those things. Lots of churches have those, though. There's something cooler about RBC that's family. It's rare in larger churches.