

FRIDAY NIGHT with RBC

by Vicki Sairs

Rosedale Bible College showcased students during the Christian education program on Friday evening at conference; they are, after all, at the heart of RBC’s mission.

Board member Jeremy Miller asked everyone in the audience to consider what an important function the college plays in the life of the conference, and President Jon Showalter gave a brief RBC update.

Following a short video on the Bridge internship program, Brittany Kuepfer took the stage. Brittany, 2017 valedictorian, presented a condensed version of a paper she wrote for Survey of Bible Doctrine, “The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament.”

“It was fascinating to study how those in the Old Testament would have understood the Spirit,” she said, noting that the Hebrew word for spirit is also the word for wind or breath. Although she warned against trying to “box God in,” for the purposes of her paper she categorized the works of the Holy Spirit into four areas.

“First, I looked at how the Spirit is the primary agent of creation and life, God’s breath into humanity and all that lives and breathes,” she said. People living in the Old Testament would have understood God’s Spirit as that which creates and sustains all of life. She cited Job and the Psalms as providing examples of people attributing “life and existence to the Spirit of God.”

Next, Brittany discussed the Spirit’s interaction with God’s people, Israel. She was intrigued by the Red Sea crossing, in which a wind divides the sea so that Israel can cross on dry ground. “Interestingly enough,” she said, “in Miriam’s reflections that follow a chapter later, the wind is referred to as God’s Spirit at work in Israel’s salvation.”

God’s Spirit was also at work in a third way, she said, through the leadership of Israel. Brittany contrasted the way the Holy Spirit indwells all believers in the New Testament with what happened previously. “When the Spirit came upon men and women in the Old Testament,” she said, “it was to bring about leadership for specific causes, and it didn’t have to do with the person’s salvation.”

Finally, Brittany discussed the Spirit’s work in prophecy. “God’s Spirit came upon the Old Testament prophets and gave them visions and words for the people.” The prophets recognized this. “For example, Ezekiel states at the beginning of his book that ‘the Spirit entered into me and set me on my feet, and I heard him speaking to me.’”

Brittany concluded that people of the Old Testament would have viewed the Holy Spirit differently than the church does today. “The Spirit was powerful and life-giving,” she said, “but not necessarily the personal Figure we know of today.” Yet the Spirit is “just as present” in the Old as in the New Testament. “Although the Spirit’s role has now changed,” she said, “I still think it is vital that we take into consideration the Old Testament when formulating any doctrine on the Holy Spirit.”

RBC alum Jesse Graber followed Brittany with a message on James 4:1-10, with a focus on 10: “Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.”

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James addressed his book to the “twelve tribes in dispersion,” which refers to the spiritually regenerated Israel—the church. “In doing so, James is also writing to us as members of the present church,” said Jesse.

Beginning in verse 1, James introduces a problem that we have: quarrels and fights. And it gets worse. James follows the progression of issues through to the root of the problem: friendship with the world. In the fourth verse, he even says, “You adulterous people!”

Jesse used a thesaurus to flesh out the term “adulterous,” inserting the alternative words to grasp a fuller meaning of what James is saying: “You unfaithful, disloyal, untrue, inconstant, false, deceiving, deceitful, treacherous, illicit, extramarital, cheating, two-timing, extracurricular people!”

James goes on, “Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?” Jesse stressed that the phrase “Do you not know?” sounded to him like, “This is obvious, you should know it, but you aren’t living like it!” His readers should know it, and so should we.

Although James tells us we are an adulterous people with harmful relationships with the world, he also gives us God’s solution in verse six: “But [after all your problems and shortcomings] God gives more grace.” This, said Jesse, is “the message of the Gospel.”

The last three verses of the passage describe how we should respond: we are to submit ourselves to God, resist the Devil, draw near to God, and “be wretched, mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning.” Jesse admitted that the last instruction wasn’t instantly clear to him. “Be gloomy instead of joyful? What? What does this mean?”

He found commentators who said these commands are strongly reminiscent of the Old Testament prophets. This “laughter” often referred to the scornful laughter of the fool, who takes sin lightly, enjoying the pleasures of this life without regard to the future. “I think it was really easy for me to read that,” said Jesse, “and think, ‘Yeah, but I’m already a Christian, I’ve been forgiven, so this mourning and weeping stuff doesn’t really apply to me.’”

But who were those prophets writing to? The people of God, who were disobeying and rebelling against God. And who is James talking to? The people of God, who have the same tendency, though forgiven, to rebel and disobey God! “I

think that if we truly grasp the weight of sin and its extreme consequences: gloom, weeping, and mourning will be our only responses.”

Fortunately, James didn’t stop there. Verse 10 says: “Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.” Jesse stressed that he believes James is talking about spiritual humility. Our efforts to change ourselves are futile; real change can only come when we submit to God and recognize our helplessness to change ourselves.

“We, the people of God have a problem—we are of divided allegiances,” said Jesse. “But He gives more grace! God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” He ended his message with a call to humility: “Humble yourselves, and HE will exalt you.”

Other highlights of the evening included: “Stories with Mel,” a time when Mel Shetler spoke directly to Brittany and Jesse about difficulties leaders face, the importance of mentors, and God’s faithfulness; and performances by The Salt & Light Co. (RBC’s mixed ensemble), The Rosedale Chorale, and The Alumni Chorale, which sang Lloyd Kauffman’s arrangement of “It May Be at Morn” under the leadership of RBC Music Director Ken Miller.