



A Memorial Address by Dr. Jack Crabtree

On June 5, a long-time friend of the Gutenberg Community, Sherri Berg, died suddenly and unexpectedly. What follows is the talk that Dr. Crabtree gave at her memorial service on July 21, 2015. The talk is a good reminder for us all of where our hope lies.

To remember Sherri for who she was, there are three different things we could legitimately consider. First, we could consider her magnificence as a creation of God. Secondly, we could consider her flawed moral nature. Or, finally, we could consider her righteousness in the defining existential commitments of her heart.

Typically, a memorial service would focus on the first of these three things. It would focus on the truly wonderful person that Sherri was. As all of you know, Sherri indeed was a magnificent creation of God, and we could quite easily spend our time remembering and praising her magnificence as a human being. And we would be speaking the truth about her. But not the most important truth. Her amazing creatureliness is not the most important thing to know about Sherri. So I am not going to focus on that.

Alternatively, we could focus on the harsh and unpleasant reality of Sherri's sinfulness. If we are truly interested in speaking the truth about Sherri, we would have to acknowledge the reality of her sinfulness as well. Like every other human being on the planet, the beauty and goodness of Sherri's many gifts were muted and degraded by that same awful reality that characterizes all of us. She was a sinner, innately prone to rebellion against her creator and against all that her creator loves and values. I think I knew Sherri well enough to know that she would have no objection to my saying so out loud.

One of Sherri's most outstanding characteristics, in my experience of her, was her blunt, unvarnished honesty. Sherri did not seem the least bit interested in coming at truth and reality obliquely. She liked her truth straight and direct—the straighter the better. She had little use for euphemism, vagueness, or obfuscation. There was a refreshing naiveté about her in this respect. It was as if her entire way of being challenged each and every one of us with the rather child-like question, "If it's true, why wouldn't you just say it?" Sherri was not interested in keeping a lid on the truth just because it might be uncomfortable, socially awkward, or embarrassing. She was as committed to a straight, explicit confrontation with fact and reality as anyone I have ever known. So, it would be very consistent with Sherri's way of being for us to reflect on the reality of her sinfulness. But I don't want to focus on that either.

Rather, I want to focus on the state and character of Sherri's "heart." The best way to remember Sherri this evening, I think, is to reflect on those commitments, passions, and perspectives that defined her at the inner core of who she was.

So who was Sherri? Sherri was a follower of Jesus, the Messiah. Her heart was committed to Truth (with a capital T), and the passion of her heart was to be good with a goodness that reflects the goodness of God. By reflecting on the nature of this commitment and passion, we will be reflecting on



Fall CAPS Courses

Dr. David Crabtree will offer the following courses this fall:

- Translation of Acts
- Deuteronomy
- Josephus' *The Jewish War* (2nd half)

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the very thing that defined Sherri at the core of who she was.

I say we will be reflecting on what defined her "at the core of who she was" because Sherri—like you and me—was not always true to who she was at heart. None of us are. We are all evil, depraved creatures who get blindsided and up-ended by the currents of folly, impurity, and unrighteous rebellion that well up from within us. God does not expect us, in this lifetime, to transcend the moral depravity that constitutes who we are. But He does expect us to turn our desires toward knowing and serving Him. He wants us to come to hunger and thirst after the righteousness that we don't have. He wants us to mourn over the sinner that we inescapably are. He wants us to come to acknowledge how unworthy we are, how undeserving of Life we are. And He wants us to come to understand that it is only on the basis of His mercy that we have any standing in His eyes at all. He wants us to make an existential choice to *strive* to serve Him, honor Him, obey Him, and come to know and love Him. These things we *can* do. These things we *must* do. We cannot *be* good. But we can decide to genuinely *love* goodness.



Memorial Address, cont.



The person whose life and being is characterized by just such a passion will fail. She will fail to be what, at her core, she longs to be. While she hungers and thirsts to be righteous, she will not and cannot *be* truly righteous. Her own depravity will sabotage her in her pursuit. Yet her commitment is real nonetheless. None of us will enter the eternal Kingdom of God gracefully. We will stumble into the Kingdom of God. We will enter in spite of the fact that sin has raised its ugly head in so many different ways throughout our lives.

Sherri was no exception to this. I would not even have to know Sherri to know that that is true. But I firmly believe that Sherri knew and understood all that I have just articulated. She knew that her standing before God was not based on how she performed; it was based on the genuineness of her longing. She knew that God would accept her into his Kingdom because she truly *wanted* to be the person that God wanted her to be, not because she had actually become the person that God wanted her to be.

Death is an ugly thing. It takes the reality of a human life and erases it. It will not take long after my death for my existence to become largely irrelevant to anyone and everyone still alive. Death is the absolute negation of everything that a person is or was. It made Jesus weep.

I already mentioned that Sherri liked her truth straight. The straight truth is that we

do not speak the truth when we say that we will always remember her. Or when we declare that we will never forget her. When we speak sentimentally of a person's memory living on, we are not strictly serious. We tell such lies to ourselves because we want to hide the ugliness and destructive power of death from ourselves. The truth is that death destroys everything. In time, even the memory of a person fades into complete insignificance. My ancestors are an abstraction. They do not live in my memory.

We cannot conquer death by leaving a legacy, by making a name for ourselves, or by any other such thing. There is one and only one antidote to death: RESURRECTION. If we are going to live on, there is only one way to do it—namely, to actually live on. But to live on is not the destiny of every individual. Most human beings will find their humanity erased by a death from which they will never return. But, so far as any of us could ever know, Sherri is among the fortunate few who will not be abandoned to death. She will *not* be lost to oblivion. She may be gone now, but death will not keep her. When Jesus returns and the final trumpet is sounded, Sherri will be re-created. She will be given a new body—a body that is beyond the ravages of those disorders that have plagued her for the past several years, a body that is beyond the pain that haunted her every movement. She will be made into a glorious, righteous, awesome, immortal being who will live eternally on the new, recreated earth, under new and more glorious skies, in a Kingdom of truly and perfectly good human beings. There Sherri will no longer be evil. She will no longer be subject to death and futility, and she will never again be victim to the evil of others. There Sherri will have Rest from the grief, the pain, the struggle, and the toil of this present existence. She will be given true Life and will endure forever.

As the Bible sees it, Sherri was a winner. She achieved victory in the here and now. In his letter we call 1 John, the Apostle John writes of those who are victorious over “the world.” What is this victory of which he writes? It is the victory of not being influenced to disregard and reject the Truth. It is victory over all the seductive lies and compelling

influences of world culture. In other words, our belief is our victory.

Our existence in the here and now is a battle. Will we persevere in clinging to the Truth, or we will we abandon the Truth and believe what everyone around us believes instead? It is no easy matter to persist in believing the Truth. It is the hardest thing any human being will ever do. And it is the most significant achievement any human being can ever achieve. Sherri, I would maintain, gained that victory. When death put an end to her existence in the here and now, Sherri hoped in one thing: that her Lord and Master Jesus would be her advocate before the Judge of all the earth and would secure mercy and forgiveness for her. In other words, her singlemost hope was that Jesus would grant her Life beyond the grave. That, I would submit, was the hope that defined her existence.

Sherri was not among those who sleep. She did not bob along in an unaware stupor. She was awake. She was wide awake to the importance, to the significance, and to the truth of the gospel that Jesus proclaimed to us. Specifically, she knew and understood the good news that God will be merciful to anyone and everyone who is willing to submit to God and who is willing to orient her life around the truth from God.

Nothing in all of human existence is more important than to gain this very victory that Sherri gained. Sherri ran the race of human existence and came out a winner. Nothing would please her more than for those whom she loved—for all of you—to join her in this victory.

As Sherri grew in her understanding of the Bible, she came to understand her creator better. She came to understand that God is the author of everything. Everything! The good, the bad, the pleasant, the not so pleasant. God is the author. Our lives are the script. Sherri's death was no accident that could have been prevented. The timing of Sherri's death was purposive and meaningful (even if only God knows the secret of its meaning). Sherri had become convinced of precisely this perspective on her life.

Sherri's death presents each and every one of us with a challenge: What are we going to do with the author of all that is and of all

that occurs? Will we ignore Him? Will we choose to be indifferent toward Him? Or, like Sherri, will we recognize that choosing to know, honor, serve, and obey God is life itself?

I hope, as I am sure Sherri would, that everyone here today will choose to take God seriously. I don't mean choose to be piously religious; I mean choose to take seriously the author of all reality. The shock of Sherri's unexpected death is a sobering reminder that *now* is the time to learn how to do this. It is *now* that we must learn what it means to take our creator seriously. Sherri took God seriously, and she died a winner. We must wake up from our indifference toward God lest we die losers.

There is no more truly heroic act than to courageously persist in believing the Truth in the face of all that is arrayed against it. We come together today, in deep sorrow, to say farewell to a true hero. For Sherri was a hero. And she will get a hero's reward.

We will miss her. There are things we had hoped to share with her that will never be shared. There are things we had hoped to say to her that will never be said. Her gain is our loss. But we can only be grateful to God today that God has seen fit to seal Sherri's victory and to make her a member of the eternal people of God.

We must say "Goodbye" to Sherri for now, until we meet up with her again at the last trumpet. May that trumpet be quick to sound. May our time apart be brief.

Come, Master Jesus, come quickly!

The faculty and staff of Gutenberg College extend their condolences to Sherri's family—husband Bruce, son Harrison, and daughter Sophia—and thank them for letting us share this talk and the photo of Sherri. To learn more about Sherri Berg, you can visit Bruce's blog at www.bruceberg.com/blog.

Dr. Jack Crabtree is the director of McKenzie Study Center; a tutor at Gutenberg College; the author of *The Most Real Being: A Biblical and Philosophical Defense of Divine Determinism*; and co-author of *The Language of God: A Commonsense Approach to Understanding and Applying the Bible*.

2015 Summer Institute Recap

by Laurel Hay, participant from Cottage Grove, Oregon



I have to say that my first Gutenberg College Summer Institute (SI), "Reunion: *Tanakh* and the Gospel of Matthew" was a thrilling experience for me and my husband. But it didn't start out that way!

Our objective, as I saw it, was to find the truth behind a specific section of Old Testament (*Tanakh*) Scripture as referenced by Matthew in the New Testament. I thought our Gutenberg tutors had a unique approach to our study. First, a tutor gave a background presentation on the specific Scriptures, then we broke into workshop discussions, and finally we reassembled to hear a "reunion" talk by another tutor to "pull it together," which was followed by a question-and-answer session. Nothing was conclusively resolved—no definitive resolution said, "This is it." I felt uncomfortable with no resolution and found it awkward and unsatisfying. Thankfully, Monday was followed by Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday! My Summer Institute experience turned out to be eye opening, transformative, and deeply, richly satisfying.

First, it was eye opening. The number of participants and their differing views and opinions really caused me to see the variety of thought among us. This opened my eyes to the variety of thoughts and intents among writers. I have a new appreciation for the Gutenberg professors and tutors who spend year after year analyzing and dissecting works of writers like Kierkegaard and, as a result, continually revise and reassess their prior opinions and conclusions. That makes sense. If you spend

time with a single writer you would, most likely, begin to discern his personality, his agenda, and his style. You would learn who he is through his words, and your analysis remains fluid and changing. I got excited to think about trying to accurately assess the thoughts and intents behind the writings in the Bible, which some say was written by at least thirty-nine authors. Needless to say, I decided it might be unrealistic to reach a definitive conclusion to a section of Scripture in a single morning!

Second, I don't think it is exaggeration to say that this totally new style of study transformed my way of thinking and studying. I suspect I was a little too legalistic and rigid in my thinking before the SI. I was motivated to always reach a conclusion with respect to interpreting the meaning of God's Word. Now, I feel so liberated. I don't have to work towards some specific conclusion. I am free to read, reflect, deduce, and then to revisit again and again. This heightens the joy of study and turns it into an adventure of ongoing learning and seeking. I am delighted!

Which is why I can say, finally, that the Gutenberg experience has had such an amazing impact on me. I loved the engaging and totally non-judgmental style of the tutors and the value of a fellowship that is alive with enthusiasm for the discovery of learning. I appreciate our friends for encouraging us to "check out" Gutenberg! I am glad we did. The total experience was deeply and richly satisfying and one to be repeated. Thank you to all who participated in the Summer Institute!



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