



## The Vindication of Losers

by Dr. Jack Crabtree

*This talk was given at Reformation Fellowship on Easter Sunday, March 27, 2016.*

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After nearly two thousand years of Easter, we are likely quite familiar with the primary and obvious meaning of the resurrection of Jesus. I would certainly not want us to ignore its primary significance—namely, the fact that God’s promise of eternal Life is not an empty promise. Easter is the most important reminder that death need not be the end. Our master and lord, Jesus, has been granted a life and existence that will extend into all eternity. That same eternal existence has been promised to us, if we find mercy in God’s eyes. Without a doubt, that is the primary significance of Easter. But I don’t want to focus on that today. Today, as we ponder the significance of Easter, I want to draw our attention to a subtler and less obvious ramification of Jesus’ resurrection—specifically, that Easter was an incredible reversal of Jesus’ fortunes and a dramatic vindication of his life and choices. As such, it is an encouragement to us to make the same choices that Jesus did.

If we want to understand the full significance of Easter, we need to understand all the different ways that Jesus could have been considered a loser at the time of his crucifixion.

- When it came to social standing and status, Jesus was not a success at all. He held no place of honor in any religious hierarchy. He occupied no place of honor in any intellectual hierarchy. He held no position of

political or military power. He spoke of God granting him power and authority, but he did nothing to grasp any real power for himself. Socially, he was a nobody. He hung out with prostitutes and various other unsavory sorts of people. He played the part of a rabbi, but he held no credentials to justify him doing so. When it came to status as measured by the culture of his time, he was pretty much a loser.

- When it came to material possessions, Jesus was a failure. So far as we know, he was content with very little in the way of material possessions. He certainly did not accumulate wealth. He accepted God’s provisions for his well-being and never desired more. By the standards and perspectives of his time—as well as now—his economic condition would not be deemed a “success.” None of his contemporaries would have thought him “blessed” by God on the basis of his possessions. When it came to money and possessions, he was just one of the loser masses.

- As a teacher, Jesus pretty much failed. While many people were somewhat intrigued by his teaching, he never successfully transmitted his knowledge, wisdom, and understanding to others. Even his closest disciples never really grasped what he was teaching. They never really understood his perspective and point of view. When all is said and done, he was more or less a loser as a teacher. He fared no better as a prophet, an evangelist, or a pastor. If not for Easter, Jesus would have had very little to show for



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all the time and energy he invested in teaching his disciples.

- Jesus was a loser at the PR game as well. There were moments during his life when the masses were flocking to him. There were moments when he was a very famous and popular figure, a star. But he was so unskilled and incompetent at managing his image that he was unable to maintain that fame and goodwill to the end. He made several blunders that drove people away from him and lost the goodwill of the crowds. Some of his closest friends and advisors had feared such an outcome and had warned him that various things he said would lead to such a result. If and when the crowds did abandon him, Jesus had no one to blame but himself. In the end, he did not have sufficient popular support to protect him from his enemies.



# The Vindication of Losers, continued

But he had himself to blame for that. He stubbornly refused the advice of his closest disciples and failed to manage and protect his image.

• In fact, Jesus was more or less a loser interpersonally. A significant number of people did not like him. Jesus had many enemies who held him in contempt. Surely that is the mark of a significantly flawed individual. Wouldn't a truly good and perfect man be loved by everybody? Wouldn't he be well liked and supported by everyone? For Jesus to have as many enemies as he did, there must have been something significantly wrong with him: a terrible personality, a lousy character, something. He tragically got himself killed because, when all is said and done, he was a tragically flawed individual.

• Jesus was a failure with respect to cultural "cool" as well. He was not among the progressives of his culture. He was way too old-fashioned. He clearly embraced many of the traditional values and perspectives of the Judaism of his fathers. There was no way he could find acceptance among the Greek cultural elite. He was nothing but one of the many "square" losers of his culture.

Jesus was an underachiever. He had had so much potential, but he never did anything with it—nothing that showed anyway. His life had been a failure. His efforts had come to nothing. All things considered, he was a joke. That, at least, is how many viewed Jesus on the morning of his crucifixion. When asked to vote with their voice, they

shouted out, "Crucify him! Crucify him! Crucify him!"

To most of the spectators gathered at the foot of Jesus' cross later that same day, Jesus again appeared to be a tragic loser. Regardless of what virtues he might have had, he had come to a terribly ignominious end: humiliated, defeated, rejected, and killed. His life was a sorry waste. At least, that is how it looked the afternoon he was crucified, for the divine verdict of Easter Sunday had not yet been given.

**W**hy did Jesus live the life he did? Why did he make the choices he made? Why did he take so little care to pursue "success" in his life?

If we pay attention to what Jesus himself claimed, he lived the life he did because he was intent on and committed to "doing the will of his Father." His choice to do so made him a "loser" by the standards of success in his time. And, in truth, by the standards of success in any time. But who establishes and maintains those standards of success? Not God, the ultimate author of all reality. No, they are established and maintained by foolish, superficial, and unrighteous human beings.

That first Easter Sunday was *God's* verdict on the life, character, and accomplishments of Jesus. By granting to Jesus indestructible Life, God was pronouncing his favor on Jesus' person and accomplishments. Jesus was no failure in the eyes of God. He was a

smashing success. He was the Son in whom God was truly well pleased.

Superficial human beings had failed to recognize how utterly profound and substantive the person of Jesus was. They had rejected him. But God, on Easter Sunday, vindicated the profound and passed judgment on the superficial.

Foolish human beings had failed to see the wisdom that was embodied in Jesus and his teaching. They held him in contempt. But God, on Easter Sunday, vindicated the wisdom incarnated in Jesus and held the folly of mankind in contempt.

Unrighteous human beings had hated the righteousness embodied in Jesus, and they murdered him. But God, on Easter Sunday, vindicated the righteousness of Jesus and pronounced judgment against all the unbelieving unrighteousness of man.

Jesus has finished his journey, and he has received his reward. You and I have not. But we can see in Jesus the pattern for exactly how you and I must live our lives. Just as Jesus sought to do the will of his Father, we likewise must commit ourselves to doing the will of God. If we do so—like Jesus—we will make ourselves "losers" in the eyes of our superficial, foolish, and unrighteous contemporaries. But also like Jesus, we will one day experience our own Easter morning, when we too will be vindicated. However unsuccessful and unrewarding our life might be—if we have committed ourselves to doing the will of the Father, then we will receive our vindication. On that day, all those who shook their heads contemptuously and deemed us "losers" will be put to shame. For the divine verdict will be given: "Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of the Master."

This may not be the primary meaning of Easter, but it is surely a part of its meaning nonetheless: Easter is the vindication of all of those who have made themselves losers for the sake of the Kingdom of God.

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**Dr. Jack Crabtree** is the director of MSC; a tutor at Gutenberg; 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*.

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**Congratulations** to Gutenberg tutor Dr. Charley Dewberry. In April, the Society for Ecological Restoration Northwest (SERNW) awarded him “Restorationist of the Year” in recognition of his efforts to promote ecosystem health, integrity, and sustainability through ecological restoration.

In addition to teaching science classes and leading Great Books discussions at Gutenberg, Dr. Dewberry is an internationally recognized stream ecologist and has worked as a restoration ecologist in Oregon since 1981. One of the most experienced field workers in the Pacific Northwest, he has worked for the U.S. Forest Service, for the Pacific Rivers Council, and for Ecotrust.

Dr. Dewberry has also authored two books for Gutenberg College Press: *Saving Science: A Critique of Science and Its Role in Salmon Recovery* and *Intelligent Discourse: Exposing the Fallacious Standoff Between Evolution and Intelligent Design*.



Gutenberg students BJ and Analia Chase perform at the **Gutenberg Student Art Show and Performance** in March.



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Last month, Gutenberg College arrived at a significant moment. Twenty-two years after our founding, the board and president have invited a fresh leadership team to chart, and then propose to the board, a new course. This team is seeking to prepare Gutenberg for an exciting new chapter in its history.

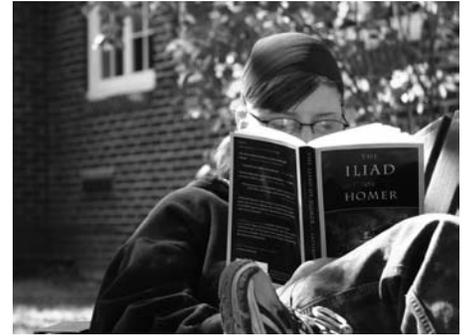
Recently the team enlisted a group of seasoned business professionals who are well qualified to guide the college into an era of sustainability and growth. We are thrilled to continue to provide Gutenberg's outstanding educational experience to generations of future students and faculty.

A long-term plan for sustainability is required to preserve what we all love about Gutenberg. Gutenberg College is a rare gem in the world of Christian higher education. Students explore the Great Books in search of truth—probing the deepest questions of human existence. Their exploration occurs under the guidance of a nurturing faculty who are confident that the biblical faith can stand its ground in a sea of contrary voices. Outsiders love visiting our classrooms. They are consistently amazed at the maturity, curiosity, and honesty of our students. Our students graduate with the unique, relevant, and

applicable skills necessary to flourish in the twenty-first century.

We look forward to sharing our progress with you. Please pray for our endeavor.

—*The Transition Team*



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