

# “The Weight of Glory”

*“For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all” (2 Corinthians 4:17). “So encourage each other and build each other up, as you are already doing” (1 Thessalonians 5:11). <sup>1</sup>*

As we make our way forward through the Gospel of Mark, we come next to the memorable statements found in Mark 4:21-25. Mark recorded six statements from Jesus in these five verses. According to Mark, Jesus talked about “the lamp and the lampstand,” “the secret that will be disclosed,” “the measure you give and the measure you receive,” and “the haves and the have-nots,” together with two injunctions to pay attention and to listen carefully.

All of these statements are found in other Gospels, but the setting in which Jesus speaks them changes from Gospel to Gospel, and the statements don’t always appear together.<sup>2</sup> The most likely explanation for this is that Jesus was speaking, teaching, and preaching pretty much all the time, and He no doubt had something resembling what we call today a “stump speech.” Thus, while these statements were undoubtedly characteristic of Jesus, He probably said them so often that the four Evangelists remembered them in different sequences and settings.

Any one of these affirmations provides enough material for a sermon all its own, and there’s no way to do justice to all four in one sermon, so I’ve been drawn to just one of them for our consideration this morning. I want to focus on Jesus’ third statement— *“With the measure you use, it will be measured to you—and even more”* (Mark 4:24).

As I pondered and played with that statement in my mind, the idea of “measure” took me to the idea of “weight,” as in “weights and measures.” As I thought about “weight,” I quickly thought about “the weight of glory” to which Paul referred in 2 Corinthians 4:17: *“For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.”*

Once I had come to that, I remembered C. S. Lewis’s famous sermon, “The Weight of Glory,” preached at Oxford during World War II,<sup>3</sup> in which he noted that “It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare.

*“All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or other of these destinations. It is in the light of these overwhelming possibilities, it is with the awe and the circumspection proper to them, that we should conduct all our dealings with one another, all*

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<sup>1</sup> A sermon by Dr. David C. Stancil, delivered at the Columbia Baptist Fellowship in Columbia, MD on January 29, 2017.

Sources for this sermon include: Barclay, William, “The Gospel of Mark,” *The Daily Study Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1954); Culpeper, Alan, “Mark,” *The Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2007); Garland, David E. “Mark,” *The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996); Lane, William, “The Gospel According to Mark,” *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974); Turlington, Henry, “Mark,” *The Broadman Bible Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman, 1969); Wessell, Walter, “Mark,” *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Volume 8: Matthew, Mark, Luke. Digital Version.

<sup>2</sup> Mark 4:21 (the lamp) – Matthew 5:15; Luke 8:16, 11:33

Mark 4:22 (the secret) – Matthew 10:26; Luke 8:17, 12:2

Mark 4:24 (the measure) – Proverbs 11:24-26; Matthew 7:2; Luke 6:38; 2 Corinthians 9:6-12

Mark 4:25 (the haves and the have-nots) – Matthew 13:12, 25:29; Luke 8:18, 19:26

<sup>3</sup> C. S. Lewis, “The Weight of Glory,” preached on June 8, 1942 at the Church of St. Mary the Virgin, Oxford, England. Italics added.

friendships, all loves, all play, all politics. *There are no 'ordinary' people. You have never talked to a mere mortal.*

“Nations, cultures, arts, civilizations -- these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. *But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub and exploit -- immortal horrors or everlasting splendors.*”<sup>10</sup>

Thinking about these realities—and I do think Lewis was right about them—took me to the words of the book of Hebrews, where we are told to “*Think of ways to encourage one another to acts of love and good deeds. . . . especially now that the day of [Jesus] coming back again is drawing near*” (10:24-25). And you may remember that Paul told the Thessalonians to “*encourage each other and build each other up, as you are already doing*” (1 Thessalonians 5:11).

And so, by this winding route of pondering and praying, our text has brought me to a consideration of the idea of encouragement—encouraging one another toward the Light and not toward Darkness—and I’m going to do this by means of telling seven (very) short stories.

**Story #1.** Dr. Larry Crabb is one of the most creative and profound thinkers of our generation with respect to Christian care and the human condition. When Larry was a young man, it was customary in his church that young men were encouraged to participate in the communion services by praying out loud. Feeling the pressure of expectation, young Larry (who had a real problem with stuttering) stood to pray. In a terribly confused prayer, he recalls “thanking the Father for hanging on the cross and praising Christ for triumphantly bringing the Spirit from the grave.” When the painful moment was finished, Larry vowed that he would never again speak or pray out loud in front of a group.

At the end of the service, not wanting to meet any of the church elders who might feel the need to correct his theology, Larry dashed for the door. But before he could get out, an older man named Jim Dunbar caught him. “Larry,” he said, “there’s one thing I want you to know. *Whatever you do for the Lord, I’m behind you one thousand percent.*”

Many years later, in his book *Encouragement: The Key to Caring*, Dr. Crabb wrote, “Even as I write these words, my eyes fill with tears. I have yet to tell that story to an audience without at least mildly choking. *Those words were life words. They had power. They reached deep into my being [and rescued me from despair].*”<sup>4</sup>

**“So encourage each other and build each other up, as you are already doing”**  
(1 Thessalonians 5:11).

**Story #2.** During the days of Colonial America, Benjamin West was one of the first American artists to win a wide reputation in Europe, and he exerted considerable influence on the development of art in these United States. As a boy, Ben loved to paint. His mother liked to paint, too, and whenever his mother left the house, Ben would pull out her oils and try to paint.

One day he pulled out all the paints and made quite a mess. He hoped to get it all cleaned up before his mother came back, but she came back sooner than he expected and discovered the mess. West later said that what she did next completely surprised him . . . and transformed his life. His mother picked up his painting and said, “My, what a beautiful painting of your sister.” She gave him a kiss on the cheek and walked away. “With that kiss,” West said, “I became an artist.”

<sup>10</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1949, 1980), pp. 45-46.

<sup>4</sup> Larry Crabb, *Encouragement: The Key to Caring* (Zondervan, 1984).

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**Story #3.** Boxing writer Harold Conrad once visited a women’s prison with heavyweight champion Muhammad Ali. “All the inmates lined up,” wrote Conrad. “They were oohing and aahing as he went along, and there were some nice-looking women in that lineup. Ali kissed some of the women as he passed them, but he only kissed the ugly ones.” After they left the prison, Conrad asked Ali why he chose to kiss only the less attractive women. “Because no one ever kisses ‘em,” responded the man who called himself *The Greatest*. “Now they can remember that Ali kissed ‘em.”

Now you know that Ali was never accused of being short on braggadocio, but in the midst of all that, this vignette shows his generous heart toward those whom others rejected.<sup>5</sup>

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**Story #4.** He was always in trouble at school, so when the parents of the middle school boy received one more call to come in and meet with his teacher and the principal, they knew what was coming . . . or so they thought.

The teacher sat down with the boy’s father and said, “Thanks for coming. It’s important for you to hear what I have to say.”

The father crossed his arms and waited, wondering what defense he could possibly use this time. The teacher proceeded to go down a list of ten things—ten positive affirmations about this boy known as “the troublemaker.” When she finished, the father said, “And what else? Let’s hear the bad things.”

“That’s all I wanted to say,” she said. The parents left the school in rather a state of shock.

That night, the boy’s father recounted the conversation to his son. And not surprisingly, almost overnight, the troublemaker’s attitude and behavior changed dramatically, and for good.

**“So encourage each other and build each other up, as you are already doing”**  
(1 Thessalonians 5:11).

**Story #5.** Mitch Albom, author of *Tuesdays with Morrie* and *The Five People You Meet in Heaven*, talked in an interview about his Uncle Eddie:

“He used to greet me with a punch to the arm. He called me ‘Buddy Boy,’ and he tousled my hair. When I got older, he would strike up a boxing pose and dare me to swing. Then he’d smile and turn it into a hug.

“They say that uncles stand to the side, that fathers and grandfathers have a more direct line to the child. But uncles, perhaps because of that distance, can be glorified in ways that others cannot, and as a boy I glorified Eddie. He was the champion in my family tree—and stronger than anyone I knew.

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<sup>5</sup> Rubel Shelly, *Starting Today*; reprinted in *Men of Integrity*, (May/June 2003).

“But as I grew older, I saw my uncle differently. For all his strength, for all his grizzled, whiskered toughness, he was sad and incomplete—a person, like many people, for whom dreams had fizzled young and life had become a dull routine of low expectations.

“In my childhood view, he had been a hero who did things I could never imagine; but in adulthood the roles were reversed. I became the man who traveled. I achieved success as a sportswriter. I made friends in many places.

“I felt almost embarrassed that so much opportunity had come my way while Eddie slogged through his days with a quiet resignation. He, of course, felt differently. Typical of relatives who truly love you, he held no envy of my achievements, only joy.

“I delivered the eulogy at his funeral. I broke down halfway through and started crying uncontrollably. My tears were tears of sadness, but they were also tears of regret. I had never said those loving, affirming, encouraging things to his face.

“We all have wonderful people in our lives—but when they’re gone, it seems all we can do is miss them. I have never met anyone as magical as my uncle seemed to me as a boy. *He should have known that. And I wish I had told him.*”<sup>6</sup>

**“So encourage each other and build each other up, as you are already doing”**  
(1 Thessalonians 5:11).

**Story #6.** Anne Miller didn’t miss the chance that Mitch Albom missed, at least in this case. When her former teacher and coach was retiring and moving out of town, here’s what she wrote to him:

Dear Mr. Scheidt,

You were always so encouraging of me, even though I had no athletic ability whatsoever. I remember one time I made a shot and I missed. You said to me, “Nice shot.” I looked at you and told you, “No, it wasn’t. I missed.” But you said to me, “*A shot doesn’t have to go in to be a good shot.*” I will forever remember that. Thank you.<sup>7</sup>

Anne

**“So encourage each other and build each other up, as you are already doing”**  
(1 Thessalonians 5:11).

**Story #7.** This last story is of a different sort. There’s a lot of good theology in Charles Schulz’s *Peanuts* comic strips, and in one of those strips, Linus has just written a comic strip of his own, and he wants his sister Lucy’s opinion. In the first frame, he tentatively hands Lucy his comic strip and says, “Lucy, would you read this and tell me if you think it is funny?”

In the next frame, you see Lucy patting her foot, and a little bit of a grin comes across her face. She looks at Linus and says, “Well, Linus, who wrote this?”

Linus with his chest heaved out and a great big grin says, “Lucy, I wrote that.”

<sup>6</sup> Mitch Albom, “He Was a Champion,” *Parade* (9-14-03), 4-5.

<sup>7</sup> Anne Miller, Wheaton, Illinois.

In the next frame, you see Lucy wadding it up, throwing it to the side, and saying, “Well, then, I don’t think it’s very funny.”

In the final frame, you see Linus picking up his comic strip, throwing his blanket over his shoulder, looking at Lucy and saying, “Big sisters are the crabgrass in the lawn of life.”

**As you think about your own life this morning, do the people in your life think of you as “crabgrass” or as a blessing, as an encourager?** If there’s someone in your life who is “crabgrass” to you, why not ask God to help you become a blessing to them? And if you are fortunate enough to have encouragers in your life, I urge you to thank them now, before it’s too late.

My friends, like young Benjamin West, every day you and I are trying to paint the picture of Jesus in our lives through what we say and do. But we make messes. We screw things up. And the last thing we need is for someone to come along and say, “What a mess!” What we need is encouragement toward greater things, toward the potential that God has put within us.

***“So encourage each other and build each other up, as you are already doing”***  
(1 Thessalonians 5:11).

“If we let Him” Lewis wrote, “for we can prevent Him, if we choose – [God] will make the feeblest and filthiest of us into . . . dazzling, radiant, immortal creatures, pulsating all through with such energy and joy and wisdom and love as we cannot now imagine, a bright stainless mirror which reflects back to Him perfectly (though, of course, on a smaller scale) His own boundless power and delight and goodness. The process will be long and in parts very painful; but that is what we are in for. Nothing less. He meant what he said.”<sup>8</sup>

***“For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all”*** (2 Corinthians 4:17).

***“So encourage each other and build each other up, as you are already doing”***  
(1 Thessalonians 5:11).

Amen, and Amen.

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<sup>8</sup> C.S. Lewis *Mere Christianity* (Macmillan, 1952), p. 174.