

## I. Introduction

- A. Welcome to Neighborhood. And welcome to Mazerunner, part 4. We're looking at the parables of Jesus — the brilliant, funny, exasperating, head-scratching, oftentimes confusing — parables of Jesus.
- B. We are saying that the world is confusing, like a maze, and that Jesus came to get us out of it. He did this ultimately by his sacrifice on the Cross, and he does this continually by his teaching. So Mazerunner, finding your way to peace in the parables of Jesus.
- C. So far we have looked at the parable of the house on the sand, and the parable of the unjust steward. Travis talked about the parable of the treasure hidden in a field.
- D. And today, I would like to talk about the Parables of the Seed and the Sower. There are a several seed parables. We will focus on two of them.
- E. Ready or not, here we go.
  - 1. *And He said, "The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground... (Mark 6:26)*
    - a) That's the start of the first parable. I would only point out that Jesus says it is telling us about something called the Kingdom of God.
    - b) We will come back to that.
    - c) In the very next paragraph, we have the very next parable:
  - 2. *Then He said, "To what shall we liken the kingdom of God? Or with what parable shall we picture it? "It is like a mustard seed... (Mark 4:30).*
    - a) That's the start of the second parable, and it's also about the kingdom of God.
    - b) That's two paragraph in a row. The third paragraph, the next one coming is a midterm exam of whether or not the disciple of Jesus got the meaning of these two parables.
    - c) Turns out they flunked the test. So we get to make fun of them, but I'll save that for last.
    - d) In order to understand what this parable is about, we need to know something about this mysterious thing called the kingdom of God.
    - e) Are you ready for some theology and a lesson in biblical interpretation?
    - f) Doesn't matter, we're gonna do it!

## II. Biblical Interpretation

- A. Let's talk for a moment about the kingdom of God. I went to three colleges to get my bachelors degree, yes, I was that motivated. The first college was a Christian school called Wheaton College. It's motto was "For Christ and his kingdom." I always loved that motto.
- B. Today, many people talk about kingdom work, and kingdom service, and kingdom this, and kingdom that. It's a bit overused, in my opinion, and it's confusing because most people don't know what we're talking about.
  - 1. Principle 1: A word is a placeholder for an idea.
    - a) When I say a word, I have an idea in my mind. Communication only happens when the word I say conjures up the same idea in your head as I have in my head. Good?
  - 2. Principle 2: Most words have multiple meanings.
    - a) So if I say ball, some of you are thinking baseball, some are thinking the dance that Cinderella went to. These are wildly unrelated meanings. How do we know which meaning a word carries?
  - 3. Principle 3: The context tells you what meaning the communicator has in mind.
    - a) So if I say, "Gliding across the dance floor, Cinderella's gown captivated everyone at the ball," you know exactly which meaning applies.
- C. So Jesus tells two parables about the kingdom of God, and then follows it up with a final exam. And in order for us to know what idea he had in mind when he said kingdom, we need to do a little study.
- D. This is called a word study.
- E. A word study is when you look throughout the whole Bible, and try to organize what it says about a particular word or phrase. Our word is kingdom, and our phrase is kingdom of God.
- F. A while back, I did some research on this. If you look up all the verses in the Bible about God being a king over his domain, you can organize all those verse into Nine main categories. Here they are:
- G. The Kingdom of God
  - 1. *The Cosmic Kingdom: God rules as king over the whole universe (Ps 19:1, Isa 66:1, Ps 150:1, Ps 47:2, Dan 4:34).*
  - 2. *The Jewish Theocracy: God was the king of the Jewish nation in the era before their earthly kings (Ex 19:6, 1 Sam 10:19).*
  - 3. *The Jewish Monarchy: even when the Jews had kings, starting with King Saul and King David, God was still their king (2 Car 13:8, Ps 22:28).*
  - 4. *The Future Kingdom / Millennium: Jesus will come to earth to reign as king a thousand years (Zech 14:9, Rev 20:6).*
  - 5. *The Societal Kingdom: whenever we build and express the values of God's kingdom in culture and society (Romans 14:17, Ps 82:3, Micah 6:8,9, Jas 1:17).*
  - 6. *Salvation: The realm of salvation is a kingdom, and you become a citizen by being saved. He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love (Colossians 1:13).*
  - 7. *Heaven: the place where God's rule and reign is always manifest with total perfection (Ps 103:9, 2 Tim 4:18).*

8. *The Kingdom Within: Whenever you build up inside your soul the realities, truths, and values of God's rule and reign. "For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you." (Luke 17:21)*

- H. A word is a placeholder for an idea, most words have multiple meanings (like kingdom), and it's the context that tells us which meaning is in view. When Jesus said the kingdom of heaven is like a seed, his listeners knew which kingdom he was talking about.
- I. The reason they knew is because earlier in this very same chapter of the Bible, Jesus told yet another kingdom parable about seed. Then, he was nice enough to decode the parable for his disciples, so they could get it.
  - 1. *"The sower sows the word. (Mark 4:14)*
- J. So we know what the seed is: it's the Word of God.
- K. Where does he sow the word? In the soil of the human heart. Inside you.
- L. Let that sink in. I am trying to make a case. That is, that the most likely definition of the kingdom of God in these parables is the last one.
- M. When Jesus talks here about the kingdom of God, He is not talking about getting saved. He is not talking about changing society or making the world a better place at all. He is not talking about establishing his righteous reign on earth in the millennial kingdom. He is not talking about heaven. He is not talking about kingdom work, or kingdom service, or kingdom this or that.
- N. He is talking about the kingdom of God within you. The seed is the word of God, and the soil is the human heart.
- O. It's about the kingdom within. That kingdom. I will explain this, but first I had to establish it... make sense so far?
- P. Great. Let's go back to our parables, and then to the final exam.

### III. Parable 1

- 1. *And He said, "The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground, and should sleep by night and rise by day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he himself does not know how. For the earth yields crops by itself: first the blade, then the head, after that the full grain in the head. But when the grain ripens, immediately he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come." (Mark 4:26-29)*
  - a) Let's decode this one.
    - (1) The man here represents any man or any woman who in any way engages with the Bible.
  - b) So here you are, at church, and we are studying the Bible together. You are scattering seed. The seed is the word, and you are spreading God's truths across the soil of your heart.
  - c) You do this when you read your Bible at home. You do this when you study in a group. You do this when you engage with a sermon. You do this when you memorize and quote verses. You are scattering the seed of the word across the soil of your heart.
  - d) This is the beginnings of the kingdom of God within you.
    - (1) *The sleeping and rising represents grace.*
  - e) He's just going about his business. He does nothing to make the seed grow.
  - f) The seed sprouts and grows in ways you don't see, don't understand, and don't make happen.
  - g) This is because the seed has a life and a power all its own. In fact, the next phrase says so:
    - (1) *"for the earth yields crops by itself."*
  - h) By itself is the Greek word: automatos. Spontaneously. By itself. Without your help.
    - (1) *For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword... (Hebrews 4:12)*
  - i) You've heard me say it a million times. When you take in the Word of God, you don't just get information, you also get power. Supernatural power. Grace filled power. More than human power, it is God's power — even when it doesn't feel like power.
  - j) Because the Holy Spirit takes the Word of God, and begins to construct something beautiful in your soul.
  - k) It's the most wonderful building project ever conceived on planet earth — it is the construction of the kingdom of God within you.
  - l) I like to call this the Royal Palace of the Soul. Hold that thought.
  - m) Jesus says,
    - (1) First the blade, then the head, after that the full grain in the head, and then the harvest.
    - (2) The growth of the seed represents the growth of the kingdom of God within you.
  - n) He's talking about growth. He's talking about fruitfulness. He's talking about reaping a harvest.
  - o) And the only way this can happen, and happen continually, season after season, year after year, is if you are sowing the seed of the Word in the soil of your heart.
  - p) There is no other way than the continually dripping of the Word of God into your soul. Put away your Bible, and the kingdom of God within you shrivels up and turns to dust.

### IV. The second parable adds some more teaching on the kingdom of God within:

- A. *Then He said, "To what shall we liken the kingdom of God? Or with what parable shall we picture it? It is like a mustard seed which, when it is sown on the ground, is smaller than all the seeds on earth; but when it is sown, it grows up and becomes greater than all herbs, and shoots out large branches, so that the birds of the air may nest under its shade." (Mark 4:30-32)*
  - 1. Same set up, same idea. More teaching on the kingdom of God within you.
    - a) Planting the mustard seed represents the humble intake of the Word of God.

2. It's not glorious. It's not like you're saving the world when you go to church and hear Bible teaching, or open your Bible, or read a book that teaches you the Bible. It's not impressive. It's a mustard seed. No big deal.
  - a) The mighty tree represents the glorious growth of your soul filled with God's Word.
3. It is greater than all the herbs. The Bible is a bigger deal than you could ever realize, because it is the raw material for the awesome construction project God is building in your heart.
4. And as this thing grows, you develop a new potential you never had before. You grow out mighty branches so the birds of the air may nest under its shade. What's that mean?
  - a) The birds nesting represent a mature follower of Christ who becomes a blessing to the world just by showing up.
5. You can focus on others instead of yourself. You can quit talking about yourself, in fact. You can love. You can give of yourself without losing yourself. The weak, the sad, the lost, the broken can find shelter in your shadow.
6. Because the kingdom of God has been built within you, and the Royal Palace has risen up — a dwelling place for God. A temple of the Holy Spirit. A place where Christ is at home in your heart.
7. That is how you make a difference in the world.
8. It makes No sense at all to try to build the kingdom of God in the world around you, before you have built it first in the world within you.
9. But that is the mistake so many churches make, and we pastors are to blame. We are too activist. Go out and build the kingdom! But we have not matured our people. We have not fed them the riches of divine grace. So we send enthusiastic people who are not ready to battle the devil, because they have not built the one fortress that can withstand his huffing and puffing.
10. That's exactly the test that's coming in the next paragraph, but let me pull a few things together first.

V. The House In the Soul

- A. When Margi and I were dating, and it was time to pop the question, I needed extra money for an engagement ring. A friend of mine, Ernie, was a bricklayer. His boss needed a laborer. So I burned some vacation time as a brick laborer.
- B. I didn't know what I was getting into.
- C. My job was to supply an endless stream of bricks and mortar to three bricklayers. I—a confirmed acrophobic—loaded bricks onto a rickety, three-story scaffolding, praying all the while against both a death-dealing fall and a hygienic indiscretion. I did this in Chicago, in the dead of winter, over snow and ice.
- D. To mix the mortar, I used water from a 55-gallon barrel. The air temperature languished somewhere below freezing. This presented a problem for me, as keeper of the water. My boss had conveniently perched the barrel on top of cinder blocks. He told me to keep a fire going underneath it, so the mortar could be happy and warm. Tending this fire by gathering and burning construction debris was part of my job.
- E. He also pointed out a big sand pile, also for the mortar. The sand had been dumped over a metal culvert, leaving a smallish tunnel through the pile. I was to keep a second fire burning in the culvert, so the finicky mortar could have nice warm sand to go with its nice warm water.
- F. There I was, a full-time pastor working as a temporary laborer on the most physically demanding job I'd ever held, in an unforgiving Chicago winter. My respect for construction workers shot up two thousand percent. By the end of each day, my body rebelled. My extremities buzzed with numbness except in the places where I felt a stabbing pain. My joints creaked like over-tightened bolts. My muscles contracted into hard knots that wouldn't let me remove my mortar-splattered overalls without Ernie's help.
- G. I piled bricks, stoked the fire, mixed the mortar, dumped the mortar into a wheelbarrow, delivered the mortar, filled the barrel, piled more bricks, stoked the fires, mixed more mortar and did it all again. And again and again and again. It was hard.
- H. But I did it for love.
- I. And I never let my wife forget.
- J. For some reason, whenever I tell this story, Margi rolls her eyes. I helped build a house for moderately rich people.
- K. But the Holy Spirit is building a house inside you. It's a home for Jesus.
  1. *Paul prays that "Christ will be more and more at home in your hearts..." (Ephesians 3:17, NLT).*
  2. *Jesus taught, "Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock" (Matthew 7:24).*
  3. *Paul taught, "Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?" (1 Corinthians 6:19).*
  4. *And King Solomon taught, "Through wisdom a house is built, And by understanding it is established; By knowledge the rooms are filled With all precious and pleasant riches" (Proverbs 24:3,4).*
- L. God is building something, and he's building it in you. Why?
- M. So you can become the dwelling place for his presence.
- N. If you have received Jesus, you have received God. He moved into you. Bible experts call this his "indwelling." It's mind-blowing when you think about it. Ever since I've received Jesus, God indwells me all the time.
- O. His presence is the only way we can handle the tidal waves that wash over our lives.
- P. The heart of every Jesus-follower has become a home for Jesus.
- Q. The Bible uses the word-picture "edification" to drive this truth home. The Greek word (oiko-domeo) means, "to build a house." In the Bible, to edify doesn't simply mean to encourage. It means to restructure your inner world. It means to create structures in your

soul that can enjoy and respond to the presence of God himself. That's why the missionary, Paul, made edification a central priority in the church: "...But we do all things, beloved, for your edification" (2 Corinthians 12:19).

- R. Building the RPS is how you become the Third Little Piggy.
- S. This is all a metaphor for spiritual growth. Spiritual maturity. Spiritual muscle. It's time to grow up. It's time to move from the kiddie table to the grown up table of faith.
- T. Bottom line:
  - 1. The kingdom of God within you is the growth of the same beliefs, the same truths, the same instincts, and the same opinions in your heart that Jesus had in his.
  - 2. It is you thinking like Jesus, believing like Jesus, responding like Jesus, showing the courage and character of Jesus even in the toughest times of your life.
    - a) Be transformed by the renewing of your mind.
    - b) Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.
      - (1) That is the kingdom of God.
- U. A fully constructed Royal Palace stands in the eye of life's hurricane.
  - 1. That's where you'll find peace in any storm.
  - 2. You'll find comfort when you're sad,
  - 3. guidance when you're lost,
  - 4. rest when you're weary,
  - 5. truth when you're confused,
  - 6. and acceptance when you've blown it.
- V. That's why Daniel withstood Babylon, Joseph withstood Egypt, and Ruth withstood widowhood and poverty. Job withstood crippling pain. They all had something inside them that kept them tight with God no matter what the giant pain machine called earth threw at them.
- W. Jesus said, *"The kingdom of God is within you," (Luke 17:21)*. Maybe one reason we're so vulnerable to adversity is because we've tried to build God's kingdom in the world but we've never built it inside our souls.
- X. I've heard a million sermons about "seeking first" God's kingdom—usually in the context of giving more money to someone's church. But what if Jesus was talking about the kingdom within? What if he meant that we should prioritize the Royal Palace in our soul and then all our blessings would flow and we'd have nothing to fear? How can we seek God's kingdom "out there" if we've never sought it in our hearts?

#### VI. The Final Exam

- A. *On the same day, when evening had come, He said to them, "Let us cross over to the other side." Now when they had left the multitude, they took Him along in the boat as He was. And other little boats were also with Him. And a great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that it was already filling. But He was in the stern, asleep on a pillow. And they awoke Him and said to Him, "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?" Then He arose and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace, be still!" And the wind ceased and there was a great calm. But He said to them, "Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?" And they feared exceedingly, and said to one another, "Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey Him!" (Mark 4:35-41)*
  - 1. Epic fail.
  - 2. The Bible translators made this nicer than it really is. Jesus doesn't just say, "Why are you so fearful?" In the original greek, it's "Why are you such sissies? How is it that you have no faith?"
  - 3. Jesus is blown away. He's a hacked off football coach. They heard him teach. They watched him do miracles. They had every opportunity to take in the Word of God, and they didn't.
  - 4. They set it aside. They didn't dig in. They didn't trust. They didn't believe. And so when trouble came, they freaked out, and they took it out on Jesus.
  - 5. Christian, you carry within you an absolute amazing potential. You can have the authority and magnetism and impact and power that Jesus had. You can walk in his steps. You really can follow him.
  - 6. You can renovate your life from the inside out: your thinking, feeling, responding, and believing. You can become a mature Christian. You can grow up. You can make a difference.
  - 7. You can be a spiritual champion for Christ.
  - 8. And the amazing thing is that the power for all this is not your power, it is God's power flowing through you just like it flowed through Jesus.
  - 9. And you don't have to be religious or weird or super spiritual or phony. You can just be yourself and learn how to use the incredible grace-resources God has supplied for every moment of your life.
  - 10. Jesus fully expected his disciples to be like him and do what he did. Take a nap in the storm. And he lovingly chided them when they blew it.
  - 11. It is God's intention to reproduce the life of Christ thousands of times over by the Holy Spirit plus the Word of God.
- B. Call to Action
  - 1. Choose today to grow up in God's Word and God's Grace that you might build the kingdom of God within.
  - 2. Follow up by opening your Bible tomorrow.