

I. Introduction

- A. Welcome to MazeRunner, part 5... where we are looking the parables of Jesus. Depending on how you count, Jesus told 45 to 50 parables. Some are long. Some are short. Some are pretty clear... but most of them are deceptively simple.
- B. The parables of Jesus are complex, funny, exasperating, confusing, and memorable.
- C. Today, I want to put together two mini-parables and study them together:
 1. *Then Jesus said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men." (Mark 1:17).*
- D. And:
 1. *Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest." (Matthew 9:37, 38).*
- E. Let's set this up. We believe there are four stages in a person's life with God. You can place yourself — every one of us can place ourselves — in one of these four stages. This is our Grace Pathway.
 1. Milestone one: God saves you.
 - a) This is the beginning of a person's life with God. It is our emphasis this year — on helping people find God and be saved. Last year was a year of foundations. This year is a year of building on the foundation in terms of evangelism.
 - b) To be saved means to be rescued from your fallen, broken, messed up condition and forgiven and brought into a position of favor and relationship with God.
 - (1) Salvation is a gift, not a reward.
 - (2) Salvation is free to us.
 - (a) It is free to us, only because its tremendously high price was paid in full by Jesus when he shed his blood and died on the Cross.
 - c) So salvation is a free gift. You receive it by faith alone in Christ alone. And if you have never been saved, that needs to be the biggest thing on your radar right now. You can be saved today. And you should be. It's priority one: God saves you.
 - d) God saves you through this thing called the Gospel — which is a truth-packet with a laser beam focus on the death of Jesus for your sins and his resurrection for your righteousness. When you hear the gospel and trust in Jesus, you are saved. The Bible teaches this in many places. For example:
 - (1) *In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, (Ephesians 1:13).*
 2. Milestone two: God blesses you.
 - a) This is the next phase of your life. In this phase, God wants you to understand the position of favor you've been brought into.
 - b) Because, on the very first day of your salvation, in that first nano-second, God did at least 33 incredible things for you, in you, and on your behalf. It's as if he unlocked a vault and opened a treasure house to you, and put your name on the title. It's your stuff. It's your treasure. You are richer than you think and blessed better than you deserve.
 - c) Immediately after you are saved, the best and most important thing you can do is to sink some roots into your riches and blessings in Christ.
 - (1) You have new powers you never had before. Learn how to use them.
 - (2) You have new possessions you ever had before. Learn how to possess them.
 - (3) You have new privileges you never had before. Learn how to claim them.
 - (4) You have new labels you never had before. Learn how to embrace them.
 - (a) *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. (2 Corinthians 5:17).*
 - d) In this "God blesses you" phase, you begin to understand who you are now that you belong to God.
 - e) That's when you are ready for the third milestone.
 3. Milestone three: God Grows You
 - a) The Bible says this:
 - (1) *As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby. (1 Peter 2:2).*
 - b) The Bible is nutrient rich food to develop all your massive potential as a child of God. So this is where you grow strong. It is where you grow deep. It is where you shake off the dysfunctions, break through the addictions, rise above the corruptions that make you fly beneath your dignity as a child of God.
 - c) As you grow, you develop GRIT... Grace Revealed in Trials. As you grow, you begin to think like Christ, and as you think like Christ, you can love like Christ and live like Christ.
 - d) Through growth, you become the person you were meant to be. All the switches that activate your maximum potential get turned on. And you begin to radiate God's love and power and grace in the world.
 - e) That's when you're going to be really good at milestone 4:
 4. Milestone four: God Uses You
 - a) This is awesome. We don't even deserve to utter the syllables in the name of Jesus Christ, but God makes us his ambassadors:
 - (1) *Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. (2 Corinthians 5:20).*
 - b) You represent God to the world. You represent God to the students in your classroom. You represent God to your family. You represent God to your office, your school, your institution, your business, and your neighborhood.
 - (1) And rising head and shoulders above all the ways you can represent God is that you, in some way that is consistent with your gifts and calling, you contribute your time, talents, and treasures to spreading of the same gospel that started this whole thing the day God saved you.
 - c) Evangelism is the epitome of maturity in the Lord.

d) And it is the very thing that Jesus had in mind when he spoke his two little parables that we are looking at today.

II. Fishers of Men

- A. In the first parable, Jesus is walking by the Sea of Galilee. It's called a Sea, but it is the largest freshwater lake in Israel. Back in the day, it was a hive of activity — villages and businesses along the shoreline.
- B. Jesus walks by and sees two brothers fishing. Their names are Peter and Andrew. He calls to them those classic words: *"Follow me and I will make you fishers of men."*
- C. So what is a fisher of men? What's he talking about?
- D. All we have to do is look at what Andrew and Peter wound up doing.
- E. They went through all the milestones of the Grace Pathway, and so they could be awesome when it was time for God to use them.
 1. History suggests that Andrew went and preached the gospel in Ukraine, Russia, Georgia, Cyprus, and Romania. He was crucified on an X shaped cross, and died because of his missionary labors for Jesus.
 - a) Follow me, and I will make you a fisher of men. Andrew followed, and his fishing was epic.
 2. Peter bore similar fruit and suffered a similar fate. He preached the gospel in Antioch, which is modern day Turkey, possibly in Corinth, which is modern day Greece, and then settled in Rome, which is modern day Italy. In Rome, he set up an awesome church, and led thousands of people through the grace pathway, until he was crucified upside down for not following the Roman gods and emperor worship.
 - a) Follow me and I will make you a fisher of men. Peter followed, and his fishing was epic.
- F. This is God's plan for all of our lives. He intends to give you a purpose. Your life means something that can last for eternity.
- G. You're here to be blessed, yes, but also to be a blessing.
- H. You're not just a bump on a log waiting for the blessed benediction when you go to heaven and meet Jesus face to face.
 1. You are fisher of men.
 2. You are fisher of women.
 3. You are a fisher of boys and girls.
 4. Of lawyers and politicians. Of homemakers and engineers.
 5. A fisher of poor people, street people, rich people, all people.
 - a) *For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law; to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law; to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. Now this I do for the gospel's sake, that I may be partaker of it with you. (1 Corinthians 9:19-23).*
- I. An old missionary named C.S. Studd wrote,
 1. Some want to live within the sound
Of church or chapel bell...
I wish to run a rescue shop
Within a yard of hell.
 - a) C.T. Studd was studly.
- J. Can you imagine what would happen if the churches across this land saw themselves as "rescue shops within a yard of hell"?
- K. What would happen if we collectively embraced our calling as fishers of women and men? If fishing became priority one? We'd see a revival that would make the devil shake in his cloven boots.
- L. The second mini-parable is like the first.
 1. *Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest." (Matthew 9:37, 38).*
 - a) The parable compares unsaved people to a harvest, saved people as the laborers, and God as the owner of the farm.

III. Send Out Laborers

- A. When Jesus told this parable, he was traveling from city to city. He saw the teeming masses of people, caught in legalism and religion. He had compassion on them — their lostness brought tears to his eyes.
- B. He said, "the harvest truly is plentiful."
 1. By harvest, he meant people who were ready to be saved.
 2. They're out there, and there are plenty of them. There are lots and lots of people who are ready to be saved.
 3. All they need is the gospel.
 - a) *For "whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved." How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent?" (Romans 10:13-15).*
 - (1) Consider yourself sent.
- C. I think we Christians underestimate three things:
 1. We underestimate the power of the gospel.
 - (1) So we feel we have to do a thousand things before we can share the ABC's of the gospel. No, we don't. The gospel is jam-packed with its own power. Romans 1:16 says the gospel IS the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes.
 - (a) It is not the power of love that wins people to Christ.
 - (b) It is not the power of social justice.
 - (c) It is not the power of good deeds.
 - i) Those may have a place. These may open some doors.

- (1) But the power is the power of the gospel. The has its own life-force inside it. Its own power. Let it loose, and see what God does.
- b) I am convinced that the only reason *our* church sees hundreds of salvations each year, while other churches see maybe one or two is simply that we routinely toss out the gospel, and pull in the net.
- c) When I first came to Neighborhood, 16 years ago, one of the men on our staff was Paul Edwardson. He was a legend and a hero of evangelism.
- d) After I was here about a year, he told me a story. Paul said, "Bill, every time I preach here, a lot of people get saved. But the last few times, they haven't. I said something to my wife, [June Edwardson] and do you know what she said? She said, "You're not getting people saved like you used to because Bill is getting them before you do!"
- e) Yes!!
- f) It's one thing to share the gospel.
- g) It's another thing to actually call for the decision, right here, right now. *That* is all too rare.
- h) Never underestimate the power of the gospel.
2. We underestimate the hunger for salvation.
 - a) There is a huge hunger in the land, especially among younger generations. They've been raised on postmodernism. This means they've been raised thinking nothing is certain, nothing is absolute. Truth is a shape shifter. And nobody can be sure of anything.
 - b) There's sadness to that, but there's a bright side too. When you grow up being told nothing is certain, it's like being on a ship at sea. You get used to the rise and fall of the oceans. But when you finally see solid ground, you crave it. You can't wait to step onto something solid.
 - c) So there's a hunger for the solid truth of salvation, especially among the young.
 - d) That's what I'm seeing today.
 - e) When we stand and say, Jesus is the Savior. He saves you from yourself. He saves you from your sins. He saves you from falling short of perfect standards of justice. His cross is the centerpiece of history, and by his shed blood, you can not only step onto the solid rock of truth, you can actually find the person you've always longed you to be.
 - f) When Jesus said the harvest is plentiful, this is what he meant. There is a greater readiness to receive salvation than you think.
 - g) Your friends at work. The people you hike with every morning. The kids at school.
 - h) When people I know start witnessing to long time coworkers or friends, one of the most common feedback they'll get is: I didn't know you believed this stuff... why didn't you tell me sooner?
3. We underestimate the love of God.
 - a) God loves lost people. More than you do. He has orchestrated their lives to bring them the gospel, if they are willing to hear it. Part of that orchestration is you.
 - b) And if you bring them the gospel, that's awesome.
 - c) Or if you bring them to the person who brings them the gospel, that's awesome too. That's the whole premise behind Real Life Redding. You can bring people to the person who brings them the gospel, and that is exactly what we will be doing next week at the Redding Ninja Event. It's going to be incredible, and you can play a part.
 - d) God loves lost people and has orchestrated their lives to bring them face to face with the gospel.
 - (1) If you bring them the gospel, that's awesome.
 - (2) If you bring them to someone who brings them the gospel, that's awesome too.
 - (3) If you DON'T bring them the gospel, then God will use someone else. Nobody will burn in hell because of your failure, so don't let any preacher beat you up with that one. God will bring someone else into their lives. They won't lose out, but you will.
 - e) *The Bible says when Jesus "saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd" (Matthew 9:36).*
 - f) There is a special place in God's heart for people who are lost. He has compassion on them. He cares for lost people and he wants them found. You as either a bringer, or a teller, or both, are a part of that plan... if you choose to be.
 - g) Jesus said the fields are white unto harvest. The harvest is plentiful. There are plenty of people ready and willing to be saved.
- IV. But the laborers are few.
 - A. But the laborers are few.
 1. 39% of born again Christians believe it's important to share their faith. So 61% say it's not important. And an even bigger percentage act as if it's not important, even if they say it is.
 - a) (<http://www.georgebarna.com/research-flow/2017/11/30/survey-christians-are-not-spreading-the-gospel>)
 2. Just to be clear: the goal of the Grace Pathway is to get you to a place where God can Use You in the cause of getting people saved. Whether you're best at bringing, telling, praying, or giving, it really doesn't matter.
 - a) We've got an agenda for your life! At lease we're up front about it.
 - b) We're not talking about making you Little Miss Perfect or Mr Perfection or anything like that. It's about getting you whole enough and happy enough and convinced enough that this gospel of grace is a treasure that you want to in some small way contribute your life to getting people saved.
 3. Because God loves lost people and wants them found, and the job of church leadership is to equip, motivate, bother, and deploy God's people to get the job done.
 4. When Jesus said the laborers are few, he meant that the size of the harvest was bigger than the number of laborers who could handle it.

5. More people are interested in getting saved than there are people available to help them.
 6. Which is sad.
 7. But it stops being sad when Jesus offers some marching orders:
 - a) Therefore pray the Lord of the Harvest to send out laborers into the harvest.
- V. Two things to notice here:
- A. One of God's names is The Lord of the Harvest.
 1. That's the good news. It's one of his most beautiful names. When God looks at the teeming masses of humankind, he so wants them to come into his family, that he has appointed himself as head of the global evangelism project.
 2. I am the Lord of the Harvest, he says. And he is working every single day without a break to bring every person who is even a tiny bit willing face to face with the glorious gospel of grace.
 3. He sends forth his Spirit to plow up the hard soil of the human heart. I believe he is doing that right now, even as we prepare for the first big event all next week. God is operating. He is softening hearts. He is breaking down preconceptions. He is correcting misconceptions. He is digging out the faulty foundations of lies the devil has told about who he is. God the Holy Spirit is the Great Evangelist and he is hard at work, prepping the harvest, before the laborers ever get there.
 4. Picture God sweeping across every person in Shasta County. He is opening their minds. He is softening the hard places in their hearts. He is directing their steps to run across invitations. He is opening shut doors. He is bringing into each person's life whatever it takes to motivate them to receive Jesus. Your neighbor. Your coworker. Your relative. Your child. Your parents. The kid at the next desk in school.
 5. The Lord of the Harvest is there, in that person's life, loving them, and drawing them toward salvation.
 - a) When you invite a friend to come and hear the gospel, you're not the first one there. God beat you to it.
 6. He is the Lord of the Harvest. That is his name. And we pray that he will draw in a huge harvest in Redding and all of Shasta County and beyond.
 7. And the second thing to notice is:
 - B. We can pray for laborers.
 1. We can pray for laborers, and then the cool thing is that we can be part of the answer to that prayer.
 2. Evangelism is guided by the Spirit of God, fueled by prayer to God, and implemented by the people of God.
 3. So God gets all the glory.
 4. How many times have we asked you to pray for people to be saved by name. Pray the Lord of the Harvest to send forth laborers.
 5. How many times have we created non-threatening opportunities to bring people to hear of Christ. Pray the Lord of the Harvest to send forth laborers.
 6. How many times have we invited you to be trained and equipped, how many times have we spoken the gospel and hauled in the net from this pulpit, how many times have we welcomed precious people into God's family one after another after another.
 - a) Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men and of women and of students and of boys and girls. Everybody needs Jesus.
 7. You can pray for your family. You can pray for your wayward children. You can pray for your classroom, your office, your hospital ward, or you prison ward. There is no barrier the gospel can't cross. The power of God is in it, and not even the gates of hell can hold it back.
 8. When you grow mature, when you grow in the Lord, when you build the Royal Palace of the Soul and the kingdom of God within you (from Mazerunner part 4), then the Lord of the Harvest uses you to reach people for Christ, and YOU become the answer to somebody's prayer to send forth laborers.
 - C. Spurgeon said:
 1. *"If sinners be damned, at least let them leap to Hell over our dead bodies. And if they perish, let them perish with our arms wrapped about their knees, imploring them to stay. If Hell must be filled, let it be filled in the teeth of our exertions, and let not one go unwarned and unprayed for."*
 - a) WE are fishers of women and men.
 - b) WE are the laborers for the harvest.
 - c) We're all there is. There's no one else.
- VI. Call to Action
- A. Pray and invite 3 people next weekend to Redding Ninja Weekend. Your job is to invite, God's job is to bring. Though you might want to offer lunch...