

Our lives are shaped by stories. Take the Theory of Evolution for example, or, the *Story of Evolution*, you could say. Someone who believes the Story of Evolution, someone who sees their life playing out in that story, will *probably* believe that human creatures came into existence through random chance. And this randomness of life will have all sorts of implications. Someone who believes that God created the world with intention and purpose will probably think very differently.

Those are large scale stories; even smaller stories shape our lives too. Suppose as a kid I win a statewide swimming competition. I could tell the story of my victory as the result of my superior talent, or I could tell it as the payoff of a lot of hard work. Either way, the story I tell will shape how I think about success and hard work and talent.

One more example. Businessmen and politicians know the power of story and so they emphasize “controlling the narrative”. If you control the narrative, if you control the story, you can shape what people believe and how they act.

Once we see how important stories are and the power they have on how we see the world and ourselves, we should stop and ask ourselves, “What story is shaping me?” “What story am I living in?” I’m going to get those questions later on, but first, it’s time for a story.

There was a man and he planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a pit for the wine press, and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and went away to a far country. When harvest time came, the man sent servants to collect from the tenants but they resist. Some servants are beaten, some are killed, but none are obeyed. After all of this, the master thinks, “I’ll send my son, they’ll respect him”. But that’s not how the

tenants see it. When they see the son, they think, “If we kill him we can take his inheritance, we can own the vineyard.” So, they take the son and kill him and throw him out of the vineyard. This is wicked and unjust, and how will the master react to this impudence? He’ll come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others.

Jesus tells this story to the chief priests and the scribes and he concludes it by citing Psalm 118, “The Stone the builders rejected have become the cornerstone, the lord has done it and it is marvelous in our eyes”.

As a congregation, we’ve been reading through this gospel of Mark together and I’m glad this text falls near the end of our study. We’ve studied verse by verse in devotions, videos, sermons, Bible Studies, and here we have the entire story told in 11 verses. In this short parable, Jesus tells the story of his ministry, but let’s be clear, let’s unpack this parable.

The landowner is God. The tenants are the people of Israel. The servants are the prophets. The Son is Jesus, of course.

God called the people of Israel to be his own. He had a unique relationship with them, he led them to the Promised Land, he fought against their enemies, he promised he would be their God. But God expected righteous fruits. He expected his people remain faithful, he expected his people to be a light to the nations. But the fruit never came. And so, God sent his prophets but the people of Israel would not listen. They beat them, stoned them, killed them.

Mark shows this clearly with John the Baptist. He came to the people of Israel, he called them to repent, to bear the fruit of righteousness. But, like all the servants sent to the vineyard, John followed in the way of the prophets before him, he was rejected and put to death.

Finally, the Son is sent to the vineyard. These are Jesus' first words in Mark's gospel, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe the gospel." But the people of Israel, especially the leaders of Israel would not repent. They would not repent of killing the prophets, they would not acknowledge Jesus as the one sent by God, they would not deliver to God the fruit of faith.

If the rulers of Israel accept Jesus, they must turn over ownership of the vineyard to him, but if they get rid of him then they keep their power. So, they arrest him in the night, they mock him, they flog him, and they crucify him on the cross.

That's what they did, but what did God do? God raised his Son from the dead, and his Son sought out new tenants and gave the vineyard to them. The resurrected Jesus became the foundation for the church, the new people of God. As for the wicked tenants? In 70AD, 40 years after the crucifixion, Roman armies marched through Jerusalem, they destroyed the city and left the Temple in ruin.

"The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes."

This is the story of Jesus, as he tells it. This parable is the gospel in a nutshell. As followers of Jesus, what does it mean to live in this story? What does it mean to be shaped by this story?

First, let's be clear where we are in the story. Obviously, we're not the man who plants the vineyard. We're not the son, we're not the servants sent to collect. We're not even the

wicked tenants. No, we come in at the end of verse nine. Verse 9 reads, “What will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come in and destroy the tenants and *give the vineyard to others.*”

“Give the vineyard to others” That’s us! That’s where we come into the story. But rather than saying “we come into the story”, it’s more accurate to say “we’re *brought* into the story.” When it comes to entrance into God’s kingdom it’s all up to Jesus. It’s not something we choose, it’s something chosen for us. We’ve been given a place in the vineyard, we’re a part of God’s people by God’s gracious will.

But what does it mean to live in the vineyard? It means that all of God’s blessings are for you. It means his forgiveness is for you, his mercy is for you, his acceptance is for you, eternal life in his kingdom is yours. God gives all these things for his people, and as we see in the story, that means you.

Membership among God’s people means that we receive his gifts, but it also means that we’re the sort of people to rejoice with the psalmist, “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes.” God’s people rejected and killed so many prophets and for so long it seemed justice would never be done. But finally, in the resurrection of Jesus, God vindicates the righteous. Finally (!), God saved his righteous one from the assaults of the wicked and it is marvelous in our eyes. And just as God vindicated his Son, so too, he will vindicate you in the resurrection of the dead.

How are we shaped by this story? We don’t look to our own works as evidence or proof that we’re right with God, because God has already brought us into his kingdom. We don’t have to wonder if we’re forgiven, or if God cares about us, or how we’ll be judged. All of God’s blessings are for all of God’s people, and that means you. And finally, as people shaped by this

story of Jesus, we don't live to gain power or authority like the wicked tenants. We don't demand respect; we don't use force or manipulation to get our way. Like Jesus, we seek to faithfully obey our Father in heaven. Sometimes faith will call us to really hard things, but we know that just as God vindicated his Son, so too, he will vindicate us.

These are just a few ways that people who see themselves living in this story are shaped, but there's one more I want to note. People who believe this story are warned by the wicked tenants. The wicked tenants got comfortable while the master was in the other country. They took their place in the vineyard for granted. Don't take God for granted. Don't use the gifts of God as opportunities to serve yourself. Instead, receive God's gifts and praise him all the more.

As I said in the beginning, our lives are shaped by stories. This parable of the Wicked Tenants shows us how God worked through his Son and how through that work we've been brought into the people of God. Thanks, be to God that he didn't leave us to write our own stories, but has brought us into his. People of the vineyard, bear the fruit of faith, be ready to hear the word of God's messengers, joyfully anticipate the coming of God's Son. To him be the glory, now and forever, Amen.

