

The Kindness and Severity of God

C. S. Lewis, *Chronicles of Narnia*: Aslan is not a tame lion.

The ancient Jews presumed that God would bless them, but they would be cut off because of their disobedience.

Romans 11:22 (ESV): ²² Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off.

God is intrinsically good, and he is not obligated to do our bidding.

I. Ungrateful Tenants (12:1-5)

¹ And he began to speak to them in parables. A man planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a pit for the winepress and built a tower, and leased it to tenants and went into another country. ² When the season came, he sent a servant to the tenants to get from them some of the fruit of the vineyard. ³ And they took him and beat him and sent him away empty-handed. ⁴ Again he sent to them another servant, and they struck him on the head and treated him shamefully. ⁵ And he sent another, and him they killed. And so with many others: some they beat, and some they killed."

Israel itself was considered God's vineyard.

Isaiah 5:1-7 (ESV): ¹ Let me sing for my beloved my love song concerning his vineyard: My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. ² He dug it and cleared it of stones, and planted it with choice vines; he built a watchtower in the midst of it, and hewed out a wine vat in it; and he looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes. ³ And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. ⁴ What more was there to do for my vineyard, that I have not done in it? When I looked for it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes? ⁵ And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard. I will remove its hedge, and it shall be devoured; I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down. ⁶ I will make it a waste; it shall not be pruned or hoed, and briars and thorns shall grow up; I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it. ⁷ For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are his pleasant planting; and he looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold, an outcry!

God is the owner of the vineyard, the tenants were the leaders of Israel, and the servants were the prophets whom God had sent to warn his people against continued sin and rebellion.

Jesus had excoriated the religious leaders before.

Luke 11:47-51 (ESV): ⁴⁷ Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets whom your fathers killed. ⁴⁸ So you are witnesses and you consent to the deeds of your fathers, for they killed them, and you build their tombs. ⁴⁹ Therefore also the Wisdom of God said, 'I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and persecute, ⁵⁰ so that the blood of all the prophets, shed from the foundation of the world, may be charged against this generation, ⁵¹ from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who perished between the altar and the sanctuary. Yes, I tell you, it will be required of this generation."

II. A Marvelous Work (12:6-12)

⁶ He had still one other, a beloved son. Finally he sent him to them, saying, They will respect my son. ⁷ But those tenants said to one another, This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours. ⁸ And they took him and killed him and threw him out of the vineyard. ⁹ What will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others. ¹⁰ Have you not read this Scripture: The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; ¹¹ this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes? ¹² And they were seeking to arrest him but feared the people, for they perceived that he had told the parable against them. So they left him and went away.

The heavenly Father sent his beloved Son.

John 3:16 (ESV): "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."

Galatians 4:4 (ESV): But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law.

The tenants did not respect the Son because they really did not respect the Father.

William Lane: "The seizure of the property is illumined by the contemporary legal situation. The arrival of the son allowed the tenant farmers to assume that the owner had died and that his sole heir had come to claim his inheritance. Under specified circumstances an inheritance could be regarded as 'ownerless property,' which could be lawfully claimed by anyone, the prior right of ownership belonging to the claimant who comes first. This was the case when an inheritance was not claimed within a specified period of time. This provision of law explains why the tenants assume that if they murder the son (and presumed heir), they may take unhindered possession of the vineyard. It would become 'ownerless

property' which they can claim as the actual occupants of the land."
William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974), 418–419.

Just as the tenants conspired and killed the landowner's son, so were the religious leaders even now conspiring to kill the Son of God.

Builders would reject stones that were imperfectly cut or otherwise deemed unacceptable.

Psalm 118:22 (ESV): The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.

Acts 4:10–12 (ESV): ¹⁰“ Let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well. ¹¹ This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. ¹² And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

Ephesians 2:19–20 (ESV): ¹⁹ So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone,

1 Peter 2:6–8 (ESV): ⁶ For it stands in Scripture: “Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.” ⁷ So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,” ⁸ and “A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense.” They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

God is good, but he is not safe. His wrath against sin is real, and our place of refuge is found only in the Son who suffered and died in our stead.