

Saved from “Sour Grapes”¹

† **cheap talk** (vv.1-4, 25-29)

† **godly pleasure** (vv.30-32)

In the Name of God’s Son who said, “I will!” then did everything well, dear children of the heavenly Father:

Maybe I could ask the children. Does this make sense to you? *“Fathers eat sour grapes, and their sons’ teeth are set on edge?”* *Set on edge* means their teeth feel dry or dull, and the sour grapes make you pucker up. But why would that happen to the sons if the fathers were eating the sour grapes? Doesn’t make sense does it? And this proverb or parable did not make sense when the people said it to Ezekiel the prophet either. In fact, they were complaining that God was making the children suffer for their fathers’ sins. And yet, God says He’s a *“jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation....”* But they missed the last part: *“...to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me.”* If the children keep committing the same sins as their parents, they will suffer too. Complaining about God won’t help. God wants to keep *“showing love to a thousand generations of those who love [Him] and keep [guard and treasure] his commandments.”* (Deuteronomy 5:9f NIV84) We call that “breaking the cycle.” In today’s text it’s like being **Saved from “Sour Grapes.”** It frees your soul from...

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Cheap talk was everywhere long before talk radio and podcasts and social media made everybody their own authority who didn’t have to listen to anyone else. When our children were little, I remember a man on the evening news after a hurricane shaking his fist at God, saying, “We’ve had enough!” **Cheap talk** always ends up complaining about God, no matter what He does. Too much sunshine; complain about a drought. Rain comes...and that’s a problem for the sunshine crowd. What’s God supposed to do?

Every generation ends up in some kind of **cheap talk** against their parents. We said the same as teenagers, sure we’d never be like them. Their sins and weaknesses were so obvious to us back then. Until sometime in your twenties you start to realize, “I’m so much like my Mom / Dad!” As your children grow up, they see your sins and weaknesses better than you do. But can they see their own?

Cheap talk by the rich and religious leaders of Jesus’ day was why we needed Jesus to *TELL US A STORY* in today’s Gospel. It’s easy for children to understand. Which son did the right thing? Both sons heard their father tell them, *“Go work today in my vineyard.”* One said, “I don’t want to!” then changed his mind and went. The other said, “Okay, sir,” so respectful – but then did not go. The church people, Pharisees, could say all the right things and act so fine, but they did not do what God wanted. They thought they were too good to repent and serve God as He commanded. They said, “Yes, sir!” then did not go to work for God. Imagine how shocked they were when Jesus said, *“Tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you.”* (Matthew 21:31 EHV)

Sincere love for God does not just say the right thing, it does what God wants. We church people today need this strong warning from God too. Sometimes we get careless about our sins as if we’re not as bad as everyone else. Or we complain that God is not fair for treating us more strictly than “bad people” who seem to get away with everything. It’s as if God is saying to us, “Don’t worry about it. Justice will be served. *The soul who sins is the one who will die.* Does that help?” Not really, God. That’s terrifying. Who does not sin? Who always, willingly, eagerly obeys your laws as commanded?

¹ 2023 WELS Worship Foundations series: *TELL US A STORY: A Story of Spiritual Sincerity.*

That's about as far as I got last night. The rest of the sermon seemed like swirling thoughts, but it was time to get ready for bed. About 2:00 am, these words kept repeating: ***“Turn to the LORD...for he will freely pardon.”*** My phone app. instantly found the whole passage from Isaiah 55:6f – ***Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.*** Or as the Lord says through Ezekiel: ***“I take no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies, declares the LORD God. So repent and live!”*** We need the third Son, the only One who can bring....

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God's kindness leads us to repentance (Romans 2:4) in Christ alone who humbled Himself.

One of those self-righteous church people came to Jesus at night with lots of questions. Nicodemus did not understand why Jesus said, ***“You must be born again,”*** or ***“born from above.”*** He didn't realize it was happening to him. This miracle of repentant faith God works in the kindest Good News ever. Jesus gave the Gospel in a nutshell to remember from Sunday School: ***“For God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”*** (John 3:16 EHV) That's **godly pleasure** for us too. God forgives through Jesus His Son who humbled himself to suffer in our place and save us from perishing in hell. Everyone who believes in Jesus is saved now and forever.

A young pastor was telling me how he tried to comfort an older pastor on his deathbed. Satan was attacking with memories of sins for which he had long ago repented. Nothing seemed to help until the younger pastor remembered the last few verses of Micah. Don't you love this? It comforts me too. ***Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy. You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea.*** (Micah 7:18f NIV84)

God was angry at our sin, but He took out His anger on His own Son who volunteered to suffer God's wrath in our place. Jesus was the only One who could satisfy God's justice. Otherwise, every sin would have to be punished forever in that place of torment where Jesus says, ***“There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”*** Some will never be sorry, but will keep complaining in anger against God for all eternity, to no avail, no matter how hard they gnash their teeth. God saved us from that through Jesus paying the penalty for all our guilt and sin with His holy, precious blood. ***“It is finished,”*** Jesus said just before He gave up His spirit to God. Easter shouts that God's justice is satisfied and we are free.

God gives you a ***new heart and a new spirit*** when you hear this Good News Gospel. It becomes your **godly pleasure** to please God. Sunday School children sing. Parents bring them and practice their memory work at home. Teachers prepare diligently so Jesus can come alive in true stories of God's grace. Then the children can go home and play Sunday School with their friends, sharing the story again!

Afraid you've done something so bad God doesn't want you? He must be angry because your friends aren't very nice? You've lost in love because your heart is broken? Bring it all to God. ***“The sacrifices God wants are a broken spirit. A broken and crushed heart, O God, you will not despise.”*** ***“Create in me a pure heart, O God. Renew an unwavering spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence. Do not take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation. Sustain me with a willing spirit.”*** (Psalm 51) ***“Forget the past.”*** (Isaiah 43:18f) ***“I am making everything new!”*** (Revelation 21:5)

Jesus says to all **Saved from Sour Grapes**, ***“I am the Vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in me and I in him...bears much fruit, because without me you can do nothing.”*** (John 15:5)

Proof? What did Dorothy Lindig, Patty Jo Weseloh, and Ruth Odegaard have in common? All single women whose legacy you're walking in today, not just with donations, but Dorothy taught two sisters, Ardell and Virginia Mathews, who taught Bill Bunde, still teaching New Life Sunday School today. They're singing God's praises, awaiting our arrival in heaven. **Godly pleasure** now...and then, forever. Amen.