

Hello Dear Listeners:

Have you heard of Grand Theft Auto IV ? It's one of those " Open world action-adventure video game series" ¹ For a while it was the biggest blockbuster in the entertainment industry. Situated in the world of organized crime, it evidently plays like an R-rated movie. It was a hot seller. as millions of copies were sold within a short time of its release.

I understand it's a strange blend of new and old. Essentially, it allows "virtual sin" – all the "fun" of murder, theft, illicit sex and the drug scene with none of the nasty consequences. That's like eating your favourite fast food and not worrying about putting on the pounds. This takes "guilty pleasures" to a whole new level.

One young person exclaimed about the game, "You can do anything you want!" That seems to be the holy grail of our society. Adam and Eve may have felt ashamed and naked after that first sin. (And after the promise to be like God. Ouch!) But here's a way, or so it seems, to have our cake and eat it too. Sin, after all, can be so delicious.

Drinking salt water

Now there's nothing new here. All sin promises some sort of pleasure. Years ago Billy Joel sang, "I'd rather laugh with the sinners than cry with the saints. The sinners have much more fun. Only the good die young."

"The sinners have much more fun." True, Christians can sometimes be a pretty morose bunch. (Not necessarily a bad thing: it may show they're in touch with stuff that we often like to gloss over.) But I would

¹ released in 2008

beg to differ with the famous song-writer about who has the most fun.

The other day I was talking to a young person who had gone through some pretty rough times a few years ago. She then decided to basically have as much fun as she could and indulge in everything our culture offers. But in the end, she confessed, it just didn't work. It all seemed hollow.

Someone else said, "It's like drinking salt water." The initial thrill of sin, whether it's gossip or gambling, in a bottle or on the Internet, holding a grudge or stroking your ego, only leads to a greater thirst and hunger for more. Eventually, it forms an insatiable appetite. And where was that initial pleasure you sought? It dangles in front of your eyes like that elusive carrot.

An alternative lifestyle

We're in rough shape. We not only look for love in all the wrong places. That applies to pleasure, fun, and happiness, too. The Americans may have made famous the line that everyone is entitled to the "pursuit of happiness." But just what does this involve? "Details, please."

The Bible also points out the seductive nature of sin. But it has something to counter it, too. Buddhism, I believe, says that we need to get rid of all desire. Then the world would be a better place. There's some truth to that, but the Bible is richer. It doesn't tell us to get rid of our desires; *it tells us to get new ones*. It holds out greater joys, greater delights, than we could ever find on our own.

That's right. Christians aren't just those who simply resolve to do what is right, with a grim determination, while the rest of the world has fun. They are those who begin to know joys and pleasures that are out of

this world. And you can, too.

First things first

The first of those joys has to be a joy in God. Another song-writer, David, talks about delighting in the beauty of the LORD. (Psalm 27) God is not just bigger than we are – he’s glorious, and David basks in that glory.

But that joy in God isn’t natural to us. That’s because, deep down, we’re all running from God, hiding from him, like Adam and Eve did in the beginning. The shame and guilt of our sin makes us recoil even from the *idea* of a personal God.

But that’s where Jesus Christ comes in. His great passion was to open up the way for us to delight in God. He came to seek and save the lost. That’s why he died on the cross for our sins. His mission also includes revealing to us the glory of our God – which we seem bent on denying. Look at the life of Jesus, look at his death. You’ll see a God whose love and forgiveness and patience are out of this world.

Ever stood on a mountain look-out and had the vista in front of you strike a deep chord within you? A certain grandeur, sublimity, and even sense of belonging, gets all rolled into one? That’s key to what it means to be human. We are creatures that were made to gaze in wonder and awe. And ultimately, not just to wonder at creation, but to be in awe of the Creator himself! We were made to know God, and to tremble from head to toe in his glorious presence.

The church father Augustine said to God, “*Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you.*” And you could say, “Our hearts search for

awe and wonder, until they find their awe and wonder in You.”

Devilish spin

There’s another pleasure mentioned in the Bible. It’s more active (and it’s the way the first joy is deepened, too.) That’s the pleasures of walking with God – in obedience and godliness. You can also read in the Bible, for instance, about *delighting* in the law of God. (Psalm 1)

It’s too bad that this doesn’t get us excited. The devil has poisoned our minds into thinking that obedience is an ugly word. But there’s incredible glory here.

We’re talking about obedience to God, the God who gave up his Son for our sake! This obedience is never something dull or boring. This is *godliness* – where we truly become like God – like him in love, in patience, in fairness, and so much more.

As a good Canadian, I not only enjoy coffee and donuts but a good game of hockey, too. I admire all the hard-work that goes into developing the skills needed for the game.

But that kind of excellence is only the tip of the iceberg. Apart from Jesus Christ, it’s really the only kind of excellence we can achieve. But we were made body *and* soul. God made us with the capacity to excel also in love, grace, compassion, justice, and so much more.

And this, too, you can only find in Jesus. He showed in his life how awesome real love for God and others can be. And it’s only him that you can find help to live like he did – through his Holy Spirit.

The joy of joys

There’s another joy mentioned in the Bible. And that’s the joy of

God himself. Sometimes we think of God as if he's just some big power in the sky – maybe like “*the Force*.” But the Bible tells us God is a personal being. Things like our emotions are actually just created copies of far greater divine originals.

There's a parable which ends with the promise, “Enter the joy of your Master.” God has joy! And we “enter into this” – we experience it, by following Jesus.

So heaven, dear listeners, paradise restored, is not just a lush tropical island. Paradise, first of all, is a place of God's joy! The joy of seeing how his love and grace have saved and redeemed his people. The joy of having a people to give himself to, into eternity. The joy of having a people to delight and worship him, deeper and deeper. The joy of the three Persons in the Triune God, their love for each other perfected in our salvation.

Now that's a far greater joy than any we can produce! Just imagine – the joy of God – the God who is greater than this endless universe. Just a few drops of that joy would be enough to satisfy me for a millennia!

Don't settle!

C.S. Lewis, the fellow who wrote the Narnia books, put it this way: our problem, he said, is not that we desire too much, but that we actually don't desire *enough*.

In his essay *The Weight of Glory* he says,
“We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.”

Have you settled?

There's so much more than the world around you offers. Those joys and pleasures are just a cheap parody. There all that humans can offer, really, in themselves. Look at Jesus. He holds out joy in God, joy in being godly, and the joy of God Himself!

Let's grab our beach stuff and go!

Thanks for listening.