

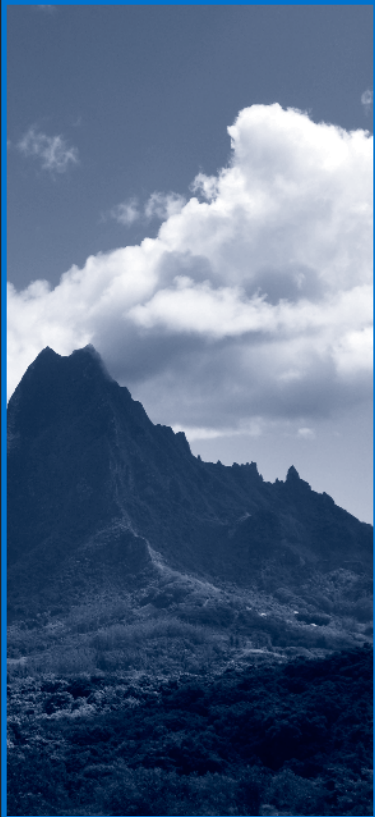


Christ's
"Reverent
Revelry"

By David Langford

THE CHRISTIAN
Appeal

Preface



RRRRich B

To dance and play games, to laugh and delight in the right sort of festivity and overflow with joy might seem “frivolous down here,” but C. S. Lewis writes that “‘down here’ is not their natural place.” Should it surprise us that “in this world everything is upside down”? He continues, “Joy is the serious business of Heaven.” Just look at Jesus! This month Consulting Editor David Langford very capably focuses our attention on “Christ’s ‘Reverent Revelry.’”

By David Langford

Because our Lord’s deepest desire was to honor his Father, he could “revel” in divine joy.



Curtis Shelburne

“As the deer pants
for the water brook,
so my soul pants
for you, O God.
My soul thirsts for
the living God.
O God, you are my God.
Earnestly I seek you,
my soul thirsts
for you.”

Psalm 42

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CHRISTIAN APPEAL

Christ's "Reverent Revelry"



Christ's "Reverent Revelry"

The previous chapters [of my book *The Influential Christ*] were written in answer to the question, "What were the qualities of our Lord that influenced people to follow him, to devote their life to him?" We have looked at the personal humility of Jesus and his individual integrity. A third quality is what might be called his "reverent revelry."

Reverence and revelry are two words that are not typically used together. To be reverent is "to have feelings of profound awe, respect, and love." It is not hard for us to see Jesus as reverent.

Perhaps it is harder to associate Jesus with revelry. Revelry is defined as "boisterous merriment." To revel is "to take great pleasure in." I doubt that our image of Jesus is very often someone who would be the life of the party. If we see him at the party at all, he is over in the corner having a serious

conversation with someone. There is, of course, a kind of revelry that is disrespectful, profane, rowdy, and rude; a revelry that has no reverence is surely not pleasing to God. But I wonder if God is equally displeased with a reverence that revels in nothing, that has never known a boisterous merriment. God has created us with a great capacity to enjoy life, to live with great passion and enthusiasm. In fact, the word "enthusiasm" literally means "to be filled with God" ("en" plus "theos"), the implication being that God should enhance our enjoyment of life.

However, for many people, to be religious is not generally associated with having a good time here on earth. Christians are perceived as being against practically everything people want to do. The world, on the other hand, is all about looking for a good time.

Just listen to the commercials, especially beer commercials.

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Schlitz beer exhorted us, "You only go 'round once in life, so grab for all the gusto you can get." Old Milwaukee beer assures us, "It doesn't get any better than this." Miller beer simply affirms "the high life."

No Fun!

The religious life, on the other hand, is often accused of taking the fun out of life. This indictment of religion generally (and Christianity particularly) found its most famous expression in a line from the English poet A. C. Swinburne: "Thou has conquered, O pale Galilean; the world has

grown grey from thy breath."
Is Jesus the "pale Galilean"?



Curtis Shelburne

Does religion turn life into a grey, dreary existence? Many have come to that conclusion, thinking that religion seems obsessed with telling

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people what they can't do or shouldn't do.

They are right about that, of course. Religion does tell us what we shouldn't do.

There is a reason for that. When it comes to enjoying ourselves and having a good time, we don't always have the best judgment. Rarely a day goes by when the newspaper doesn't have at least one heart-breaking headline reporting on someone's good time coming to a tragic end.

"A Way That Seems Right"

The wise Solomon, who had devoted much of his life to pursuing every kind of good time imaginable, finally concluded, "There is a way

that seems right to a man, but the end of it is destruction" (Proverbs 14:12).

It is interesting that Swinburne wrote his poetic attack on the "pale Galilean" at age 29. By age 42, his own pursuit of a good time ended up in alcoholism and such deteriorated health that he had to be committed to the care of his legal advisor. There is a kind of revelry

that ignores reverence for God, and though for a while it seems right to a man, the end of it is destruction.

Years ago, I attended a conference in New Orleans. One night I went out to walk down the famous Bourbon Street. I was surrounded by dazzling lights, delicious smells, and delightful music. It

There is a kind of revelry that ignores reverence for God, and though it enthralls, the end of it is destruction.

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had a magical, intoxicating effect. Something about it seemed right, somehow the way the world should be. The streets and the restaurants were filled with people enjoying life, having a good time. Every street corner had musicians serenading the crowd. At night everything seemed right.

The next morning, I walked down Bourbon Street again. What a different sight!

The establishments that dazzled in the night looked cheap and tawdry in the light of day. The night before was filled with pleasing aromas drifting

in the air, but in the morning the air was filled with a



Curtis Shelburne

stench drifting from alleys filled with the garbage of the previous night's celebration.

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On the night before, people danced in the streets; on the morning after, I saw people in gutters sleeping off the effects of the previous evening's celebrations.

Clearly, not all the revelry the night before was reverent.

A High Price

For many, the price of their good time was way too high. For some, the cost was their purity, selling their own or buying another's body for a moment's pleasure. For others, the cost was their sobriety, self-respect, and self-control as their pursuit of pleasure ended up in addiction to drugs of every kind. And the cost to the neighborhood around Bourbon Street was not cheap. I was told by several who lived there to

be very careful as I walked around because there was potential for violence and crime around every corner.

Not all the revelry in

New Orleans that night was bad. But a fair amount of it was revelry without reverence. And because we humans are so prone to bad judgment about having a good time, it often falls to religion to remind us of

what we too willingly forget, to warn us of what we are too ignorant to know or perhaps too stubborn to accept. So religion, like all expressions of authority, often gets a bad rap. People see religion emphasizing reverence with little to offer when it comes to revelry. So, not surprisingly, people don't usually seek out

Not all the revelry in New Orleans that night was bad. But a fair amount of it was revelry without reverence.

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a religious crowd when they want to have a good time.

Not "Pale"

Enough

This is why it is curious that the Scriptures describe Jesus as someone people did seek to "hang out" with. In fact, one of the criticisms of Jesus was not that he was a "pale Galilean," but that he was not pale enough!

You perhaps recall Jesus' frustration with many who criticized his lifestyle. "To what, then, can I compare the people of this generation? What are they like? They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling out to each other: 'We played the pipe for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and

you did not cry.' For John the Baptist came neither eating nor drinking, and you say, 'He has a demon.'

"The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and you say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners'" (Luke 7:31-33).

Now the Scriptures are very clear: drunkenness and gluttony

are sinful; so I am confident the accusation that Jesus was a glutton and a drunkard was false.

At the same time, rumors are usually based on some element of fact. And the Scriptures tell of many occasions when Jesus was at a party or a wedding or a festival of some kind. We know

The Scriptures tell of many occasions when Jesus was at a party or a wedding or a festival of some kind.

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there were at least twelve separate Jewish festivals during the year that Jesus likely would have observed. So, counting all the dinners and weddings and other celebrations not recorded in Scripture, there was no shortage of occasions to observe Jesus at a party of some kind. And I would dare to suggest that Jesus was the life of any party he attended because Jesus, more than anyone else, was filled with life.

"I Am the Life"

When Jesus said, "I am the Life," he was not referring merely to a life on the other side of death but to being considerably more alive this side of death as well.

"I have come that they may have life and have it to the full" (John 10:10). To see Jesus live was to see what it means to grab all the gusto life has to offer. As far as the "good life" goes,



John Gullely

it doesn't get any better than Jesus.

Does that mean Jesus was rude and rowdy? No. Coarseness, vulgarity, obscenity, crudity come from the

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and he came to show us how to live as well. Surely people saw in Jesus the leaping, dancing, clapping, shouting, and "bursting" repeatedly referred to in the Psalms and the prophets.

The "Jesus life" was the kind of life the prophet Isaiah invites us to experience when he writes, "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and labor on what does not satisfy? Listen to me and eat what is good, and you will delight in the richest of fare. Give ear and come to me; listen, that you may live" (55:1-3).

Then Isaiah goes on to describe the exuberance of the life God offers to us. "You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and hills will burst into song

spirits produced by fruit, not the fruit produced by the Spirit. Jesus was not rowdy or rude, but neither was Jesus timid or tepid. Jesus knew how to live life to the full,

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before you. And all the trees of the field will clap their hands" (55:12-13).

This world is meant to be lit up with joy and singing and dancing of which Bourbon Street, even with all its fatal flaws, is a kind of distant echo, a faint shadow. Isaiah invites us to embrace a life that praises God. And sometimes, not necessarily all the time, that praise is nothing less than boisterous merriment.

"Boisterous" Praise

What better word than "boisterous" describes the words of the psalmist? "Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet; praise him with the harp and lyre. Praise him with timbrel and dancing;

praise him with the strings and pipe. Praise him with the clash of cymbals; praise him with resounding cymbals. Let everything that has breathe praise the Lord" (Psalm 150).

When Jesus invites us to abundant life, he is not calling us away from revelry but away from that kind of foolish revelry that enjoys life without any reverence for

the Giver of that life.

God has filled our world with every imaginable good thing to give us pleasure and delight. As the psalmist has said, "[The Lord] satisfies the desire of every living thing. The Lord is righteous in all his ways and loving toward all he has made . . . He satisfies the desires of

We enrich our joy when we praise the God who has filled this life with so much pleasure.

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those who fear him" (Psalm 145).

The Fullness Of Joy

The Scriptures warn us not to diminish our joy by making gods out of life's pleasures. Rather, we enrich our joy when we praise the God who has filled this life with so much pleasure. Christ came not just to bring us joy, but to make our joy full.

Many people experience joy, but much of that joy is not full. The fullness of our joy depends on what we enjoy ("joy in"). Unfortunately, many pursue joy in ways that show no reverence for God, and they end up like Solomon, feeling empty.

"I denied myself nothing my eyes desired. I refused my heart no pleasure" (Ecclesiastes 2:10). Yet, in the end, he concludes that revelry

without reverence for God is meaningless, vanity, empty.

Even good things become empty when placed ahead of God. There are many good things God has given us to enjoy life: the joy of a good

meal, good music, an exciting game, closing a big sale or bringing in a bumper crop, finding a true love, bringing a child into the world. These are the joys that God wants us to delight in.

But none of these can make our joy full. They are all God's gifts to us, but they are his lesser gifts to us. If we

Even good things become empty when placed ahead of God. None of these can make our joy full.

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look primarily to his lesser gifts for our ultimate joy, we will end up as Solomon did: empty, not full.

Why Jesus Came

Jesus did not come to eliminate our revelry, but to enable our revelry to be more satisfying by binding it to reverence.

"Let my joy be in you."

Enjoy what I enjoy. Desire what I desire. Long for what I long for, and you will be satisfied.

There is a danger in desiring. Longing to possess can turn into being possessed by our longing. The test of our desires is what happens when our desires possess us. Things become sinful when our desire for them controls us.

There is nothing wrong with money, but to be controlled by a desire for money is greed.

There is nothing wrong with a desire for sex, but to be controlled by sexual desire becomes lust and immorality.

There is nothing wrong with family, but to be controlled by family is dysfunctional.

When the desire to be

attractive controls us, it becomes vanity. When the desire for safety controls us, it becomes paranoia. Obsession for justice is vengeance. Desirable things become destructive when we desire them too much.

Jesus' life was not a reverence without revelry or a revelry without reverence.

Jesus' life was not a reverence without revelry or a revelry without reverence. Christ had a reverent revelry.

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The "influential Christ" had a reverent revelry. His joy was a heavenly addiction. He desired the one thing you cannot desire too much.

"As the deer pants for the water brook, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for the living God. O God you are my God. Earnestly I seek you, my soul thirsts for you" (Psalm 42:1).

A Heavenly Addiction

Jesus was addicted to God, and that heavenly addiction led to a life of reverent revelry, a boisterous merriment, a life that celebrated God. And because he reveled in God, he was able to revel all the more in the life God gave him.

This is the great irony of life. If we love life more than God, we will lose the joy God



Curtis Shelburne

intended life to give. Our joy will not be full. There will always be emptiness, an aching for something more. But if we love life and all its joys less than we love God, we will discover a capacity to love life more and have even more joy.

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So, the next time you sit down to enjoy a good meal, take a moment to give thanks for the One who, in his desire to delight you, gave you the gift of hunger. If you do that, you will enjoy your meal even more.

The next time you are at the ballpark cheering for your team, take a moment to give thanks for the One who, just because he loves you, gave you the gift of enthusiasm and passion, and you will enjoy your game even more.

The next time you sing or play or dance or paint or write, as you are enjoying your gift, remember the One who designed your DNA to contain a reflection of his own divine artistry.

The next time you embrace your beloved and feel the warmth of that love returned, stop and give thanks to the One who loved you so much he gave you a heart that could flutter and

skip a beat; do that and you will love even more.

The Most Common Problem

The "influential Christ" knew how to live his life with reverence and revelry. There are many in this world who seek revelry without reverence for God. But I suspect the problem with most of us who seek to follow Christ is that we are more inclined to opt for a reverence without revelry.

Each week we gather to celebrate the Lord of Life, to sit around the Lord's Table on which is served the Feast of Life. We sing and preach and proclaim we have found abundant life. And we are disappointed that each week thousands refuse to come to the Feast. They choose instead to mow the lawn or play some golf or watch a game or get a few extra hours of sleep. And we wonder,

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why would anyone refuse the invitation of God to come to his Feast?

They do not come because they do not think it is a very big deal. And they may have a point, because if they do come, what do they see? Do they see a party? Do they see people who have found true joy and meaning and satisfaction in life?

Is It a Party?

We know what a party is; we know what it means to celebrate, and we don't do that enough in church. We are quick to criticize those whose revelry is without reverence.

But what of reverence that rarely revels? What kind of religion is that?

What kind of religion is it

that rarely shouts or leaps or bursts with joy?

I remember a story my dad told me. When he was a preacher in California, a man came forward to be baptized who had not grown up in church and had lived a pretty colorful life.

As the man came up from the waters of his baptism, he began to whoop and holler, shouting

things like "Hallelujah!" and "Praise Jesus!"

Dad, being the good Church of Christ preacher that he was, took hold of him and told him, "Hush up!"

But the man said, "I can't be quiet! I'm saved! I have to praise the Lord," to which my dad replied, "Well, you can't do that here!"

Oh, that Christ would teach us how to revel in the life God has given and how to revere the God who gave it.

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Jesus came "that they might have life and have it to the full." People are looking for that kind of life. We are all hungry and thirsty for a life that is full and satisfying.

We are all like the woman at the well, needing to fill our buckets. Jesus told her, "Whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (John 4:13-14). Which of us would not respond just

as she did? "Sir, give me this water!"

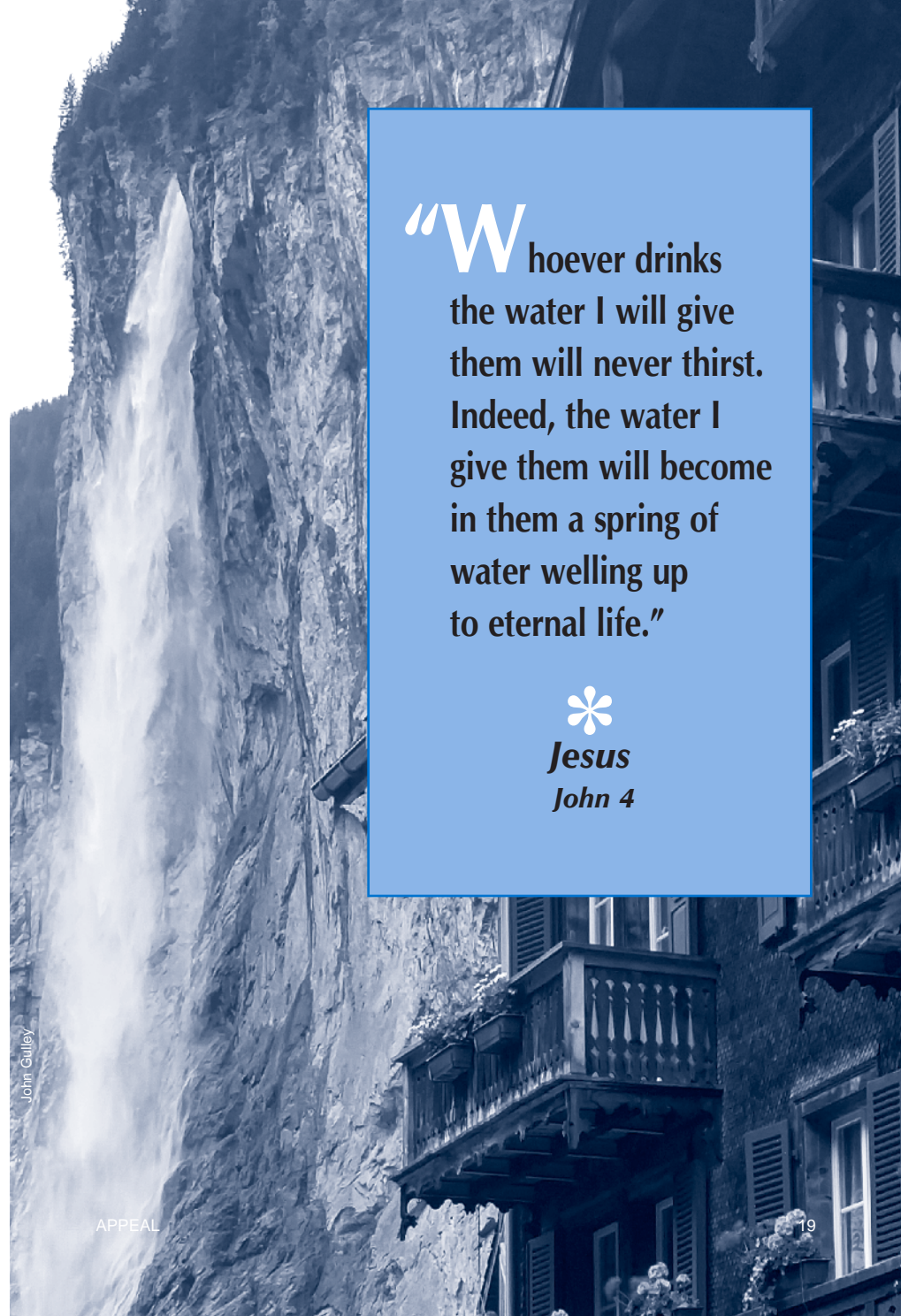
Oh, that we would long to receive the life Jesus longs to give! Oh, that he would fill our emptiness, quench our thirstiness, enliven our weariness, and enlighten our darkness! Oh, that he would teach us how to revel in the life God has given and how to revere the God who gave it!

Then the world would see the "influential Christ" in us and come to us asking, "How do I find that kind of life?"



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“Whoever drinks the water I will give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”



Jesus
John 4

*An inspiring look into the
winsomeness of our Lord.*

A FINE BOOK

by

Dr. David Langford

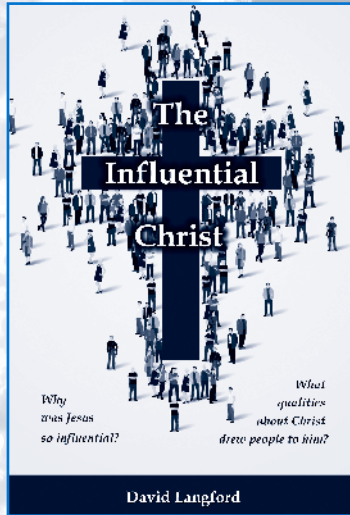
focuses on some

*of the most
astonishing*

qualities of our

Lord, the amazingly

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