

Date: March 7th, 1999 [lesson 1]

Is There "FUN" in the Bible?

Introduction Recently I figured out what I want to do when I grow up! I figured out that if I could just do the things which are fun (for me) I would do five things... 1) study and teach the Bible; 2) study and listen to music; 3) work with computers; 4) run small groups; 5) do one-to-one discipleship with people who are hungry and teachable. Those are the top five things in my life which are fun (outside of family life which is also extremely fun for me).

In the months before I made a personal decision to start really seeking Jesus, I had a certain agenda for finding and making fun in my life. It involved parties, girls, lots of loud music, sports (of several kinds), pinball, my '65 Thunderbird, girls (did I mention them?), electronic stereo equipment, going to demonstrations, and once in a while all of the above in a single afternoon! Then I met Jesus and my life started to really change. My categories for "fun" began, almost immediately, to get altered and transformed. I didn't really set out to change my categories-it just started to happen automatically. But what did NOT change was my hunger for fun. For some reason, becoming a Christian didn't immunize me from the need to have fun. That was twenty seven years ago and I find that I am still hungry for fun. That's what I want to explore with you from this pulpit for the next four Sundays-for it is my belief now that in a proper and holy sense, having fun in life is godly and in fact is like God. My conviction is that ultimately everything the Lord IS and does in some way provides a holy pleasure in the godhead.

Now I admit, "fun" is a bit of a tricky word to define and nail down. Some Christians would immediately dismiss this as a frivolous topic, a waste of vital pulpit time. I beg to differ... On the contrary, as I have been thinking about this for some time I am of the conclusion that from both theological and practical standpoints-"fun" is a very important thing-defined properly, at least. Now, the dictionary gets us this: "Fun is mirthful sport or diversion; merry amusement; joking; playfulness." But IS THERE FUN IN THE BIBLE? Since we figure that if we can validate a thing by finding some endorsement of it in the Bible-we can explore the thing as part of God's plan for our lives, don't you think? Now, I have a simple answer to this question... YES. And my simple explanation is the since God is in the Bible, fun is in the Bible. Turn with me to Psalm 16. This is actually a serious, somber psalm, David wanting God's presence and protection in his life. He is in something of a hole of darkness but as David places his focus and his faith in the Lord he says, my heart is glad and glory rejoices (vs. 9).

And in vs. 11 Thou wilt make known to me the path of life; in Thy presence is fullness of joy; in Thy right hand there are pleasures forever. We read more words like this also in Psalm 36:7,8: How precious is Thy lovingkindness, O God! And the children of men take refuge in the shadow of Thy wings. They drink their fill of the abundance of Thy house; And Thou dost give them to drink of the RIVER OF THY DELIGHTS (the same word for "Eden" in Genesis) for with Thee is the fountain of life; in Thy light we see light. And also Psalm 46:4 There is a river whose streams make GLAD the city of God. Now what does all this have to do with FUN? Well, I am equating fun with "delights" and "gladness." You see, I take this subject very seriously. I am talking about frivolous self-indulgence. But my suggestion to you is that it is the very nature of our God to generate joy and delight and gladness. That translates into the holiest kind of fun. And He was having fun long before He created people. His creatures did not invent "fun." He did! I don't know if he invented golf and archery and cooking and music-certain gifted individuals seem to have done that. But He put inside of them the capacity to think, to create, to enjoy and to benefit others. Those elements of "fun" reflect the Creator Himself.

Let's look at those elements, some BASIC COMPONENTS of holy fun with which I think you will identify.

First, fun involves **interest and intrigue**. It is a mind-thing. Something is fun when it is interesting. When I was a junior in high school everyone seemed to dread having to take history in your junior year and government in your senior year. There was no way around it; state law! Well, in 1968 our high school was allowed, and I was selected as a "guinea pig-among 25 others-to try an experimental honors class called U.S. Studies, a pilot and alternative program to History/ Government. The teacher was fantastic. And one of the things he did was to introduce a unit into the class which lasted for a couple of months which he called a "simulation." Each member of the class was given a permanent "role" in a fictitious "Town" and he, the teacher, called himself the "god of fate" and would, each class, introduce some scenario wherein the class members had to react, play off each other, cooperate, negotiate, etc. We learned more about government in that two months than you can imagine. We were fascinated. We were intrigued. I couldn't wait to get to class. Now such a thing may not strike you as fun but it did me-and as I remember, most everyone else in the class.

I believe this reflects the basic nature of our God. He is never boring. He is always alive and fresh and new in what He does. When He created the earth and the sun and the moons and everything there is, He said "It is good." His creative activity was a supreme example of His intellect and thought. And in the midst of it He was thinking, "this is fun." In the passage from Matthew 17 I see something in the words of Peter that demonstrate this principle. He said to Jesus (vs. 4), Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, I will make three tabernacles here; one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah. Now this is an amazing reaction to me, for lots of reasons. But one thing I can see in his words is that he thought it was fun to be there at that moment. There was great interest and a wonderful sense of intrigue! (Who wouldn't be?)

Second, holy fun involves **creativity**. When we're having fun we're making something new. It might be something tangible (Bob likes to carve; Betty likes to cook; Donald likes to build boats). It might be something like an idea (Dean likes to do research). It might be something expressive (Gary likes to write poetry. Beth likes to draw; Jon likes to write songs). It might be something directly related to ministry (finding new ways to communicate biblical truth to children). But we're having fun when we're being like our Lord in creative ways. It gives us energy. It is life at its fullest. We don't have to go far in the Bible to see how the Lord is this way. He created the earth and all that is in it. He created a people for Himself, beginning with Abraham and continuing down to whomever that is TODAY who will become a Christian. He is creating an innumerable multitude of things at the hands of His children by which He will receive glory.

This new building is one thing that I am excited about! I have been hungry from a creative standpoint to put up a facility that is creative in design and pleasing to the senses, reflecting a little bit the wonder of our Savior. Great pride was taken in the construction of the original Temple in Jerusalem. The finest artisans in Israel went to work! Now I know we live in a different dispensation and that therefore there are different spiritual realities now. But the nature of the God we serve hasn't changed. And I want to give Him as much creativity as we can afford. When Renée and I lived in Dallas we were involved in the construction of a church-Trinity Fellowship. I remember that one of the church members, who was an artist, offered to paint seven large pictures for the auditorium, one each depicting the seven days of creation. It was artsy. It was intriguing. It was cool. It was fun!

Third, holy fun involves **joy**. Maybe this is the word most closely related in Scripture for what I mean by FUN (as Tony Campolo pointed out in the tape excerpt). Fun things make us happy. Unfun things bring us down. Now I think I am the only person I have ever met who seems to have the gift of "going to meetings." I'm weird, I know! But I must tell you that most of the time I look forward to meetings. It wasn't always that way. When I worked as an engineer in Washington I had to attend a lot of boring meetings into which I had no input. I had to sit for hours, look businesslike and just be there. That's not fun. But then I figured out that what I really wanted to do was to invest my life in the ministry of the Gospel and well, that does involve a lot of meetings too! But all these meetings I go to now, track back to the Gospel in one way or another. I'm having fun being with people I like in a Trustee meeting or an

Elders meeting or a Diaconate meeting or a Worship Team meeting or a building committee meeting or a Mullein Hill Board meeting. Man, we're doing the work of the ministry here. Everything we do is supposed to be furthering the Kingdom of God. And most of the time I like to go to meetings because I think the Kingdom of God is fun!

Last (today) holy fun involves **goodness**. Like "joy," "goodness" is another of what the apostle Paul called a "fruit of the Spirit." It is a thing that grows out from your life, even as your life becomes more and more controlled by the Holy Spirit in Christ. This is where we leave the world's concept of fun in the dust. If a thing is not good, it is not like the Lord. I challenge you to use that as a **FILTER** for everything that you currently think is "fun." If you think professional wrestling is fun, how is it good? If you think dating, partying, sports, slot machines, various aspects of sexuality, video games are fun, fine—but how are they good? Sometimes a thing may even involve creativity, intrigue and even joy in some emotional sense. But if it is not good it is not godly. Everything He does is good. Nothing He does is not good. This is why there is such an emphasis in the New Testament on edification. It is the Lord's way to build people up. And we're supposed to have fun in doing it. Holy fun involves goodness—that is His design.

Is there fun in the Bible? Well, I can't find a fun-section. The Bible deals with serious events and serious teachings. The Bible delves into the deepest depths of existence and what it's all about. But since the God of the Bible is the creator of fun, I believe that He wants us to have fun in serving Him. I believe He designs for us to experience joy and energy and creativity and interest and goodness in every ministry we design, every service we plan and every fellowship we organize. He is a wonderful God and we have only just begun to see what He has in store for us!

Date: March 14th, 1999 [lesson 2]

Aren't Christians the Most Serious People on Earth?

Introduction We are talking about fun in these messages and if this seems like a silly subject to preach about, consider how prevalent it is for us, let alone in our private lives...(overhead). It seems to me that a church, in addition to being a place where people worship God, learn the Bible together, train their children, and they organize for the Kingdom of God, is **ALSO** a place where Christians just enjoy being together. It seems to me that a church is supposed to be a happy place, a place where you can feel the joy of the Lord among the people. If persecution were to break out or if some natural catastrophe occurred then you put more energy into survival. But barring that, when times are peaceful (which they are for us at the moment) it strikes me as natural that the assembly of believers in the Lord Jesus Christ should be jovial place.

Recently Renée was speaking with one of our missionaries and the subject of "Pastor Damgaard" came up during she discerned that he thinks I am some real severe and serious guy! I said to her, "Him not know me very good, eh?" And that concerned me, that I must be giving off real serious vibes. I don't want to be thought of like that—although when I feel led to write letters to the local newspaper editor about serious subjects I can see why I give that impression...

The passage before us, 1st Chronicles 16 is interesting to me because, once again, we are looking at primitive Christian joy. (I call it "primitive" Christian joy because it took place about a thousand years before Christ.) David appointed a bunch of people to celebrate and to thank and praise the Lord God of Israel (verse 4). In verse 5 we read that they had music! It's kind of a worship team, isn't it? Then in

verses 8-36 we get some psalms going (portions of which would later become Psalms 96,105,106). I see in this passage a JOY to just be near the ark of the covenant. To have God's abiding presence near to him, David was overjoyed. He wants to "party", in a holy way. And he legislates that around the ark will be a jovial place. It was serious business, to deal with the ark of God. But for God's people it was a happy place. I don't know if it was FUN, as we think of fun, for Asaph and the boys to do the task of celebration. But it was joyful, at least for a time. It was serious AND it was joyful.

Now, we're a pretty serious people, too. We are charged with the task of being the mouthpiece of God in so many things.

- We bear the Gospel, and the Word of God with us wherever we go.
- We look for ways of being an influence, "salt and light," in a decaying society.
- We are to go about the task of helping each other deal with our sin problems, which in itself is a sobering work.

All of this makes for a pretty sobering "job description" for us. But if all we are is serious and sober and somber all the time, when does someone on the outside see the joy of the Lord? I must say—I believe a great many churches (where the theology may well be impeccable) are not especially happy places to be. There seems to me so OFTEN to be either legalism or intellectual snobbery and joy folks, is killed by both of those. That is not what Jesus Christ is nurturing within us. He is not making us into latter-day Pharisees. No, no, no! No, He is nurturing and trying to develop the joy of the Lord inside of us. Well, let's just look at some verses from the "wisdom literature" of the Old Testament...

- How blessed ["happy"] is everyone who fears the Lord, who walks in His ways. (Psalm 128:1)
- How blessed ["happy"] are the people whose God is the Lord (Psalm 144:15b)
- How blessed is the man who finds wisdom, who gains understanding (Prov.3:13).
- A joyful heart makes a cheerful face (Proverbs 15:13).
- A joyful heart is good medicine (Proverbs 17:22).

I love verses like these! Yes, we are the most serious people on earth.

- We are "future people" because we have a predestined place in the future.
- We are a commissioned people and no one else is! We're charged with good news, to spread the glad tidings.
- We are a transformed people a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light (Deut.10:14; Is. 43:20; 1st Peter 2:9).

But it is BECAUSE of all these truths that we can relax! We can have a joy about us and a freedom to enjoy life. It was for freedom that Christ set us free... (Galatians 5:1a). Therefore what I want to suggest to you is that we should have a certain light-heartedness to us. Not a sloppiness about things related to holiness. But a light-heartedness. Not a naive view of what is going on in the world, not a PollyAnna-ish approach to this culture. But a light-heartedness. We know how all things are going to come out, and in Christ, we are on the winning side. We have no cause to be dark-spirited, or harsh with each other. No, we are the most serious people on the planet but we are also the most freed-up and the most qualified to be happy and to enjoy the days that the Lord gives us, however many that will be!

It concerns me how much joy is being gobbled up BY CHRISTIANS by concern over the Y2K problem. Some Christians are getting so scared that it seems to be all they can think about. Well, I'm interested in it too but I REFUSE to allow it to capture my joy. That is sin.

Now, here are some suggestions, as I view it, for maximizing happiness and keeping a church fun to be around... And I want to phrase this as a series of "balances":

Balancing...

Dignity/humor. While we enjoy a lot of humor around here-and I try to never take myself too seriously; it is a goal, at least!-it honors the Lord when we guard the dignity of His work and the positions people hold in His work. A Sunday School teacher, a deacon, an elder, a pastor, all deserve a certain acknowledgment for the importance of their positions. We are light-hearted but we are also respectful. We balance dignity with humor.

Propriety/laughter. One of the things the book of Ecclesiastes teaches us is that there are proper times for all things. There is a time to laugh and there is a time to be quiet. Yeah, we're serious sometimes. That's because we want to guard the propriety of certain situations. When the Scripture is being read or when someone is praying everyone else should be quiet. In a small group when someone is sharing their heart, it is a time to LISTEN and really hear what they are saying. We need to become discerning about that. We should never tell jokes about sin or make light of it. But we balance the quiet times with the laughing times and we can "cut loose" lots! A fun church is a church where the people enjoy being together, where they don't TAKE THEMSELVES SO BLASTED SERIOUSLY! Man, how I am tired of Christians who do that. So many churches make the minor issues the major FEATURE of their church. Sometimes it's minor doctrinal details; sometimes it's how people dress in church; sometimes it's nit-picking each other's children. Man, I tell you sometimes I just think Jesus Himself would say to us, "Just lighten up!" I appreciate some radio preachers who perceive this: Chuck Swindoll, Steve Brown, James Dobson and others...

Ambition/contentment. Two other things we balance are ambition (where we drive ourselves to achieve more) and contentment (where we let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts). Some churches are so ambitious to numerically grow, so that they can stockpile more resources out of which to grow more, that they make their people DRIVEN. Well, it is obvious that God has protected us from that frenzy. He has given us time to get to know one another in this church and I believe, time to LOVE one another and learn patience with one another. The fun is kept in a church when ambition is balanced with a godly kind of contentment.

Self-control/Fun. The Scripture tells us that another one of the fruits of the Spirit, along with joy, is self-control. He is gradually teaching us and building within us that virtue of "temperance." Jesus was this way. He could laugh. He could have fun, I am sure. But it never lapsed over into being out of control. He had fun balanced by the power to always keep Himself under control. We need to be that way too.

Are Christians the most serious people in the world? Well, it depends on whether they are paying a price for their faith. Believers, in places where it is dangerous to be a Christian, are probably more serious about their faith than we tend to be. And there are definitely plenty of unbelievers around who are more devoted to their religion, whatever that may be, than we tend to be sometimes. But even so, we have the Holy Spirit of God within us; we have been saved by grace through the blood of God's only Son. We are the future-people. We are the apple of God's eye. Let's ENJOY that fact!

Date: March 21st, 1999 (Lesson 3)

When Is Fun Not Fun?

Introduction I think we have an image problem. It seems to me that evangelical Christians are perceived in our society as being fun-hating, sour-pussed, disapproving moralists. We look like we're the ones always ready to wag a finger in people's faces and tell them what they're doing wrong. Sometimes we really feel like we need to take a stand in public on certain critical issues because we sense that if we do not, who will? But there are many other times when some critical issue is not at stake but we it appears to the "press" (let's say) that we are looking for ways to scowl at the neighbors!

Our image problem does not serve us well. Because it looks like we don't have much fun. In effect sometimes I wonder if we look any different at all, to the non-Christian watcher, than, say, Jehovah's Witnesses.

But having acknowledged that we may in fact be sending messages of NOT-FUN sometimes, we need to understand in the "theology of fun" that there are times when what seems to be fun, in fact is not real fun-it is just the flesh. Any time we're developing a "theology" of something we are making decisions about what is right and true about the "something" and what is not right, what we think is false. Fun is no exception. As we have suggested up to this point, we believe that fun is an important part of life and in fact, an important part of what God wants us to experience. He wants us to be joyful and most of the time, at least, to have a certain light-heartedness. He intends that in Christ, we can enjoy life far more than the person who has the guilt and death-sentence of sin still governing his life. Our theology of fun is DICTATED by our theology of salvation, our theology of the Holy Spirit, and even effected by our basic theology of who God is... We think that fun. In a good way, in a Spirit-filled way, is SUPPOSED to be right in the middle of the Christian life!

But even as Christians, the flesh and the old nature can still grab us. And we need to understand that fun can become unfun easily. Some examples:

- 1) A young Christian man starts to go out with a young Christian woman. They become acquainted with each other, become comfortable around each other, and start to enjoy each other's company. They start to look forward to being together. They start to have fun together. But then in their being comfortable and letting down their guards with each other, they begin to get physical in their relationship. They start to hold hands. They start to hug a lot. They start to kiss and then to do so more and more passionately. Now the hormones get awakened and the body, autonomically, wants to move towards more and more sexual activity. What was fun in the beginning of the relationship begins to become more "biological" and less fun. It becomes more self-indulgence. Fun has become not fun.
- 2) People are in a small group, a Bible study or a fellowship group. They've been together for a while and they've gotten to know each other. They look forward to getting together and they have started to enjoy the safety of Christian friendships. But in relaxing with each other, they begin to get careless in what they say to each other. They start to joke around about each other. They start to make comments about each other's appearance or about one another's activities or hobbies. They joke, but their speech goes too far. Feelings are hurt. Trust is injured. Fun has become not fun.
- 3) A church initiates a big ministry project. The idea was a great idea. Everybody was excited about it. The goals of the project were biblical; the motivation for the project was good. There was talk of how each church member could use their individual spiritual gifts to support the project. At the start everything went well. But soon some people started to express strong opinions about some of the details of how things should be done. They exerted influence by talking up their opinions. Then finances for the project became an issue and the church discovered that there was a wide spectrum of strong feelings about how money should and shouldn't be spent, and about how support of the project seemed unfairly represented by the younger people in the church. Planning meetings became less fellowship and more

arguments. Then some people in the church withdrew from the project altogether and refused to support it. What had been fun in the beginning had become not fun.

In 1st Corinthians 3 we read about a fairly sophisticated early Christian church, a church not lacking in spiritual gifts or evidently, size. But they are a fairly carnal assembly. They are still, as Paul describes them babes in Christ (vs. 1). They are Christians-they have a sure foundation, Jesus Christ (vs. 10). But they are not building ON that foundation very well. In verse 17 he tells them by engaging in various activities-and there seem to be quite a few bad things they're doing-they are destroying the temple of God, the temple here meaning their church body. You know, in a perverse way; in a fleshly way, for some people at least, factions in a church are "fun." For some people, in a perverse way, sexual immorality is "fun." For some people, in a perverse way, bringing litigation, lawsuit against someone is "fun." They derive a certain kind of "energy" from these things-and if you think, "Oh, Christians wouldn't stoop to those forms of activity." Well, these are all things we read about in 1st Corinthians!

In 1st Corinthians 10 we have the passage we read earlier (which we also read together in the Homebuilders' group this week where we talked some about temptation. In vs. 7 Paul quotes from Exodus 32:4: The people sat down to eat, and drink, and stood up to play. Sounds like FUN to me! Of course the occasion is when Moses was still up on the mountain and the people had crafted a golden calf to worship-out of their earrings!-and God was very displeased with their carnality and idolatry. Why I mention this is show that even though I think we should be light-hearted and considering this life as FUN in Christ, it is an awesome God we serve and we need to keep a check on our sense of fun. We are freed from the guilt of sin in Christ. We are freed from the judgment of sin, in Christ. We do not have to sin, as Christians. And we are freed up to enjoy life to the fullest-in Christ. But at the same time we are still capable of falling. The Corinthians were. So are we...

Let me lay out today some ideas about how to tell when fun is becoming "unfun."

Four Signals that Fun Has Become Ungodly

Fun is not fun when it grieves or quenches the Holy Spirit of God

As believers we possess God's Spirit, to the fullest. He is inside of every true believer in Jesus Christ. And He reacts to decisions that we make. He can be grieved by us and His fire in our lives can be doused. If some activity that I may think is fun, is in fact carnal and fleshly and unglorifying to God, then there is a price to pay.

Fun is not fun when it injures another person's feelings or reputation

This may sound like teaching material suited for children but we adults-even as Christians-can be pretty insensitive as to how our mouth is affecting people. We are to be a healing people, not a people that injures others. That translates to each one-to-one relationship that you enjoy.

Fun is not fun when it draws young Christians into questionable situations or practices.

We are responsible for the influence we exert-intentional or accidental-on people of earlier spiritual maturity that we are. If you or I want to go some place or do something, and your doing so influences a younger Christian to also do so then you are culpable in their exposing themselves to temptation. Fun has limits. If it is drawing a younger Christian into dangerous territory, we need to forfeit the fun-or change the activity-to protect the younger Christian. No "fun" is so important that it is worth damaging a brother or sister in Christ.

Fun is not fun when it promotes self.

This is the keyword in our culture: "Self." And there is a lot of self-promoting fun out there, not the least is all which is designed to bring financial profit, through the avenue of "fun" to the individual. Gambling

comes to mind; as well as many other means of "entertainment," the premise of which is the pleasuring of "self." This runs completely counter to the whole Gospel message and mutates fun into Unfun....

May the Lord Jesus teach us the boundaries of true fun. May He infuse us with His Spirit and with His mind on how to avoid the protection of godly fun and how to avoid its deterioration into unfun.

Date: March 28th 1999 (Lesson 4)

The Future of Fun

Introduction On this Palm Sunday I am reminded of Palm Sundays when I was a kid which were fun, as we waved palms at each other and usually were given pre-Easter treats by our Sunday School teacher and sang special songs about Holy Week, as it was called. In my upbringing, Palm Sunday was pretty much just a fun time, a break in the routine. But today I want to continue this idea of a "theology of fun" from the pulpit. I think any self-respecting attempt to do a "theology" of something needs to consider the "something" in the future. I have said that I think that we think that fun is a pretty important subject. We need it; the Lord intends us to experience it because, I have suggested, it is integral to His nature. His fun is pure and holy. His fun never gets old and is never tainted with carnality or impurity. His fun is similar to joy and we might say that His fun is the verb form of His joy. And I have tried to make the point last week, that when we stay within the confines of His revealed will we avoid the deterioration, the rotting of fun into "unfun."

And as well I have admitted that the word "fun" is not really technically speaking a biblical word. We can't really turn to a central teaching passage on "fun" the way we can on salvation, the nature of who God is, the plan of the future and so forth. But we can see many governing principles of fun in the Bible which apply universally to God's people of all ages. So we ask today, what will be the future of fun? When Jesus comes back, will it be fun? If we do not handle that question carefully it will seem frivolous, I know. I do not mean to suggest that we can look forward to a big, rowdy party when Jesus comes back. But when He comes back will there be joy, excitement, intrigue, interest?

In the Book of Revelation we have, I believe, the absolute lowest and the highest examples of fun. In Revelation 11:10 we have an interesting look at one kind of fun that will be going on in the last of the last days, what we would call "the Tribulation." The passage describes the death of the two witnesses who will prophesy FOR the Lord and against the forces of the beast. They will be murdered and then there will be a party. There will be "fun" or as John calls it rejoicing and making merry even with presents because their voices have been shut up. The fun will be in the lack of voices of holiness. "We don't have to listen to you guys any more," people will sing! This, of course, is evil fun at its climax.

But then in Rev. 21 we have the opposite--a powerful passage and one of the most awesome in the whole Scripture! We see in vs. 1 that even the most basic things that we take for granted will be completely changed in the age to come! But from a "fun perspective"-just getting real-we have a little question: John says he saw that there will no longer be any sea... I don't know... Some people really like the sea and boats and deep sea fishing and all that. In our world there's a whole fun-industry associated with the sea. But wait a minute-we read in Rev. 16:3 that the sea on that day will be quite unlike the sea in our day... (And the second angel poured out his bowl into the sea and it became blood like that of a dead man; and every living thing in the sea died). But as for there being no more sea as we know it now, all I can say with things like this is, if it takes water sports to make you happy when you get there, it will be there. (In fact that is a pretty good principle to think about for whatever you love about this world, when imagining life in the New Jerusalem!)

Then John likened the New Jerusalem to a bride on her wedding day. Now, I think that most women are having a great time of fun on their wedding day. The anticipation, the once-in-a-lifetime white dress which symbolizes purity and virginity...the pageantry of the wedding march. And as John wrote this, Jerusalem was in ruins. He was writing this in something like 90 or 95 AD and Jerusalem had been utterly destroyed by the Romans twenty years earlier. The Jews loved their city and to see it made new must have given John great joy. Dr. Ryrie suggests, the New Jerusalem will be the dwelling of all believers, together, from all times and for all time... It will be a place, not just a state of mind or being.

But it will not be merely a place-designate to which believers will be dispatched. It will be the place where God Himself and where Jesus IS. God shall be always close at hand, nearby, right there (see John 14:3).

One of the most fun times in my life was when I first joined the Boy Scouts. What really made it fun (as I remember it) was the time I got to spend with two older Scouts (John and Mark) whom I just thought were the coolest guys around. When we went camping I got to spend hours and hours with John and Mark--there was no clock on our time. It will be like that with Jesus in the New Jerusalem. Where He is, we will be. I can think of nothing more fun or wonderful.

Then we read about some things that here always seem to impede fun, to defeat it or to prevent it--these will be done away with there: tears of sorrow (which John saw Jesus personally wiping away every tear!), grief, death and dying (which means separation), as well as the BIG fun-killer: pain.

Then we read about what seems to me to be a very basic feature of what we would think to be godly FUN--newness, novelty, creative and inventive genius.

When a new electronic device hits the market, many people are excited. When we purchase a new car, we are excited. When a new child is born, we are full of joy. The commonality is newness. When God re-engineers the place of the saints' existence it will be bathed in a divinely guaranteed newness. That almost certainly guarantees it will be immensely FUN.

And where we read the Lord's direct words, I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost we have perhaps an allusion in John's mind to Isaiah 55:1,2. That for which we most deeply thirst--joy, fulfillment, unimpeded newness-- will be freely available in the New Jerusalem. And this promise is sandwiched between His very signature (Alpha and Omega) and His adoptive covenant (inheriting as His own son). There can be no finer guarantee!

But the section closes on a terrifyingly UNFUN note, to say the least. We are not to forget what lies ahead for those who do not experience new life in Christ, the warning about the future place of the lost is terrifying. Fleeing to Christ is not just a quaint expression--it is what we do when we are "saved," hence the word "saved." Beyond dreaming about the New Jerusalem and its incalculable benefits for all the saints, there is the consequence of rejecting Christ. Alongside the words of comfort and hope in this section there is the warning NOT to turn aside from the offer of the Gospel.

Have you trusted Jesus Christ as your personal Savior?

Have you aligned yourself with Him?

Have you demonstrated this publicly by being baptized as He commanded everyone who would say, "I am a Christian?"

Have you really begun to seek the Savior in your life? Do you mean business?

If you have struggled in your faith, have you persevered in seeking Him?

Do you love Him and are you willing to give up your life for Him if necessary?

I think the funnest thing I have ever done was to personally invite Christ into my life. In 1972 I was hungry. I SO wanted the power of a real God and I SO wanted to feel that God loved me. It was fun in a good sense, to experience new life. When I began to follow Jesus Christ it opened doors of fun in a hundred ways. I thought I knew what fun was before I became a Christian. I didn't. I knew what laughter was. I knew what practical jokes were. I knew what a fun game was like. But until I met Christ I had no IDEA the kind of fun a person could have.

Fun is not just something I'm interested in-it is basic to my theology. Because more than anything I want to know the Lord as He really is. I believe that He is the fun-Maker. I believe that He intends us to feel, to understand, to experience His joy. Jesus said this (John 15:11;17:13).

We're not supposed to be hang-dog, trudging around, woe-is-me soldiers. We're the children of the King. We're the bride of Christ! We're the adopted guests of the City-maker, Jesus Christ. Our names have been carved into His hands. He's going to give us each a new name! We're the apple of His eye! Man, oh man-let's get on with it! He is a wonderful God and we are His covenant people. What could be more fun?