



This Sunday we began a new series in Ecclesiastes. We considered the first 14 verses, which serve as an introduction to the book.

Our expectations were set as we read the first verse and realised that we were being addressed by the “son of David, king in Jerusalem”. Perhaps we were in for a great treatise or work of theology on God’s nature or the history of Israel...

But instead, in v2, the teacher said: “Meaningless! Meaningless! Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless”. The word translated “meaningless” at its most simple means “breath”. **Our lives**, the kingly teacher declares, **are like a breath**. There for a moment, and then gone. This resonates, perhaps, as we think of how the good times in particular seem to fly past so quickly.

Next the teacher asks: “What do people gain from all their labours at which they toil under the sun?” (v3). We reflected upon how **we work and we work and we work, and so often we gain so little**, or at least so little of real value.

We then read the teacher’s poem in v4-11. We noted how the cycle of creation never really changes (v5-7), and how humanity functions on repeat too, with generations coming and going (v4). We noted that, living in this endless and incomplete cycle, **we never truly feel satisfied or full** (v8), and that we long for the new, but “there is nothing new under the sun” (v9-10). And for us as individuals, we’re here and then we’re gone (v11). Just like a breath. Few of us make any real difference to the world. Few of us will be remembered.

We concluded by seeing that the teacher had set out to get to the bottom of life, to study and explore it (v11-12). Wonderfully, he chose to use wisdom as his tool.

Yet he reminds us that he has already given us his verdict. All the things done under the sun are “a chasing after the wind” (v14) – as futile as trying to catch the air in your hands.

But there were two glimmers of hope:

1 – the teacher studied “all that is done *under the heavens*” (v13). But we know as believers that there is a world *above* the sun. There is more to life than what we see and experience in the here-and-now, under the sun.

2 – the teacher tells us that “*God* has laid [this burden] on mankind” (v13). God has given us human beings this way of living in his fallen world. It is part of his sovereign plan that life in his now-fallen world is like this (see Romans 8v20-21). Life “under the sun” doesn’t just describe the life of the unbeliever; it is the life of every human. God doesn’t bring us escape or grant us immunity from fallen world living. In fact, it is quite the opposite. Rather than taking us out of it, he entered it himself. God the Son was made a human, and endured a life of frustration, futility and pointlessness just as we do. Thus, he is far better equipped than this Solomonic king to guide us through life under the sun. For he is the one who lived in the world and who overcame it. What wonderful good news!

Here are a few questions you might want to use with your group or for personal reflection...

1. What do you think it means that life is like a breath? How have you experienced that?
2. How have you felt your “work” (paid or unpaid) to be futile?
3. Why does the teacher not seem to find the cycle of creation to be an encouragement? Does this ring true or seem strange?
4. What were the two glimmers of hope that the teacher gave us in v13?
 - How might it change how we read the book to know that life under the sun is the *human* experience, not merely the unbelievers’ experience?
 - How might it change how we read the book to know that we have a God who came and lived with us in the futility and frustration of human and life?