



We continued our series in Ecclesiastes this Sunday, looking at chapter 2.

We began with the reflection that all of us are **hungry for happiness** – both in the big picture and the day-to-day decisions we make.

The teacher of Ecclesiastes went on a **hunt** for happiness.

- First stop: the University of Jerusalem (1v16-18). He applied himself to study wisdom (1v17), but he discovered that increased knowledge leads to increased sorrow (1v18).
- Second stop: going 'out out' – living for the weekend (2v1-3). The teacher gave himself to pleasure, but it all proved to be “meaningless” (2v1-2).
- Third stop: industry (2v4-11). The teacher resolved to make something of himself. He applied himself to work, building projects, and the great outdoors. But “nothing was gained under the sun” (2v11).

Having thus far failed, the teacher **hit the brakes** on his hunt for happiness (2v12-16). Death is the great destroyer of all our hopes and dreams, he realised. Every single thing that we have it takes away, leaving us with nothing.

The teacher's response to this is to **hate life** (2v17-23). The teacher rails against his experience of life, following in the footsteps of Job, the Psalmists, Paul in Romans 8v20-21, and Jesus in Matthew 27v46 and Mark 14v36.

Finally, the teacher tentatively turns to **hope** (2v24-26). God is brought back into the picture, and he is brought back into the picture as a giver (see 1v13). To be able to enjoy our work and the things of this life is the gift of God. But the conclusion isn't “eat, drink and be merry because that's *all* there is,” but rather

“eat, drink and be merry because that's *what* there is”. Eating, drinking and toiling are what our lives are made up of. The teacher wants us to give up our big dreams and goals and focus on the small, ordinary lives God has given us, aiming to eat, drink and find satisfaction in our work through and in him.

This is incredibly humbling, but it is also very reassuring. We don't need to be constantly aiming for the sky – always doing better and being better. And we don't have to be martyrs, depriving ourselves of any and every earthly pleasure. It is OK to enjoy a good coffee or ticking something off our to-do list. In this we have Jesus as our example: the one who certainly did great things for God, but probably spent far more of his time on earth simply doing life with a small bunch of followers – eating, drinking, talking and travelling. That, though he was the eternal Son of God he did this for us – that he might then die to save us – is incredible. Let us, like him, eat, drink and do all things for the glory of God (1 Cor 10v31).

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

1. In what ways do you see your life organised around the desire to be happy?
2. What things, in our society, are we tempted and encouraged to think will lead us to happiness?
3. Why does the topic of death stop the teacher in his tracks in 2v14-16?
4. What is your response to the teacher's hatred of life in 2v17-23?  
-- Do/can/should we feel this way about life?
5. Is there a difference between the nihilistic creed (“eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die”) and the teaching of Ecclesiastes? If so, what is it?
6. How did Jesus embody this teaching in his earthly life? Why did he embody it?
7. How can we eat, drink and do all things for the glory of God (1 Cor 10v31)?