

STUDY 3 || *ECCLESIASTES 3*

ETERNITY IN OUR HEARTS

Pete Seeger's song "Turn, Turn, Turn" became a number one hit when recorded by The Byrds in 1965. You've probably heard it - cheerful harmonies singing about a 'time for everything', with lyrics lifted straight from Ecclesiastes 3.

Point a phone camera at the code and listen to the song.



What emotions does the song generate for you?

ANCIENT WISDOM

Read Ecclesiastes 3:1-15.

1. The only words Pete Seeger adds to Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 come right at the end... “a time for peace, I swear it's not too late.” How does this contrast with the sentiment of verse 9? (What point do you think verse 9 is making as it follows on from verses 1-8?)

2. What are the (five or six) things God does in verses 10-15, and for what ultimate reason?

3. What do you think it means that “God has set eternity in the human heart”? Can you describe this from your own personal experience? (What has it lead to for you?)

Read from verses 16 to 22.

4. What problem is the Teacher describing in verses 16 to 20?

As the Teacher asks his honest questions about life, he comes (again) to an honest conclusion. From his limited human perspective, there's no real evidence of justice in this life. And there's no evidence for anything afterwards. *Everything turns to dust.* And 'who knows if the spirit of man rises upward and if the spirit of the animal goes down in to the earth?' From the Teacher's perspective, no human is in a position to answer a question like that!

5. From verses 12-13 and 22, what's the only option left open for living life?

How satisfying do you find this as a solution?

Notice that in verse 13, a life like this that finds satisfaction in the small things is a gift from God. In other words, that's as good as it gets. From his point of view, nothing in verses 2 to 8 can be changed by our toil or effort. The worker gains nothing that lasts in the face of eternity. All we can do is be good, be happy, eat and drink, and find what satisfaction we can working on the assembly line. There's nothing better ... because that's our lot (v22). The Teacher can know no better than that - he's got no view on anything that lies beyond the cycles of 'life under the sun,' except that somehow God has placed a splinter of unfathomable eternity in our hearts to make us revere (fear) him.

6. Australians are famous for our "she'll be right mate" attitude. What would the Teacher say to this?

Everything Turns to Dust

American anthropologist, Ernest Becker, echoes the words of the Teacher: "Unlike animals", he says, "we know that we're going to die... Animals continue grazing placidly while others drop alongside them. The knowledge of death is reflective and conceptual, and animals are spared it. They live and they disappear with the same thoughtlessness: a few minutes of fear, a few seconds of anguish, and it is over. But to live a whole lifetime with the fate of death haunting one's dreams and even the most sun-filled days—that's something else."

Ernest Becker, *The Denial of Death*

Someone said recently, “Life in Melbourne is great. We get great coffee, and all the latest fashions, and I’ve got a great job at the hippest advertising agency. The only thing missing in my life is meaning and purpose...”

But what difference would it make if God somehow broke through into our bubble, if the mystery of death was blown open, and there was at last someone who could bring a man to see “what would happen after him”? It’s time to take a look at the difference Jesus makes.

GOSPEL WISDOM

First, notice that God’s intention in locking us into a ‘frustrated world’ remains the same. Read aloud in your group the words in the sidebar from **Romans 8:20-21**.

Romans 8:20-21

²⁰ For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

7. In your own experience, what evidence is there that ‘the creation is in bondage to decay’?

8. Just to make sure it’s clear - what is God’s intention in leaving us in this groaning world? How has that worked for you?

9. How does the resurrection of Jesus (and the gospel that ‘the one who died for sin IS King’) give tangible meaning to life now?