

Eat, Drink, and Be Merry ...

(Wait a minute. Did our Pastor just say that? Yes, he did. Read on!)

In our recent Bible Class study of Ecclesiastes, we've been wrestling with the wisdom of King Solomon and his analysis of, well, life. All of it. Without repeating all of our study and discussion (which has been rather intriguing, challenging, and helpful, by the way), allow me to summarize some of what we've learned.

When measured by earthly wisdom, even the finest earthly wisdom of all time (King Solomon's, see 1 Kings 2), all of this life "under the sun" is "vanity," empty, futile. That phrase, "under the sun" is key, for it means this examination is purely of *this* world and *by* this world, leaving God out of the picture for the time being. So, the book of Ecclesiastes starts off on a pretty depressing note.

At this point, earthly wisdom would come to its well-known conclusion: "Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we may die." In other words, we might as well enjoy what we have because this is the best it's going to be. With death comes the end, and you can't take anything you've gained with you—in fact, you may leave your life's work to fools who won't appreciate what you've done. And our earthly wisdom has neither hope nor promise for anything after we die. It's all "vanity."

Like I said, pretty depressing.

But then Solomon, backed into this depressing corner, puts God into the picture. He concludes, "There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God" (2:24). Suddenly, any fleeting enjoyments the world has to offer are seen as just that, *enjoyments*.

But to see the things around us as true enjoyments, we have to get back to theological basics: God is God, man is man, and there is a whole universe of difference between the two! God runs this world, not us. No matter how hard we try to take on God's job, try to run our lives our own way, and try to worry about all the things of this world that we can neither understand nor fix, we'll never do it. We need to let God *be* God, and accept the fact that when it comes to planning, arranging, or producing things in this world, we contribute absolutely nothing.

It's at that point that we can leave the bigger problems and questions of life to God, and we can enjoy the simple things that God personally delivers to us. As Martin Luther wrote: "In sum, we should not find enjoyment in happiness, goods, our own counsels, or any other thing; only as God has given them should we use them. One should let God have His way. It is not up to us to prescribe the place, the person, or the manner; if we do, we shall go wrong. This does not mean that happiness is condemned as something evil or vain. What is condemned is human striving and planning, when we ourselves want or try to create happiness without respect to the will of God. (*LW, AE* 15:30)

Or, as Dr. James Bollhagen (author of the Concordia Commentary on *Ecclesiastes*) puts it, "Be happy! Have a good time, and do good! In terms of application to human life, this is the point of the whole book: *God wants you to be happy*. The picture that emerges in the book is easy enough for any two-year-old to understand. There is a gracious God, who sees the big picture. He makes everything work out just right for the good of his children. He, and he alone, takes care of absolutely everything that is important. Sure, life is hard, but God the Father arranges for and provides one hundred percent of anything his children really need, both for this life and the life to come. This he has done in his Son, Jesus Christ." So with each passing day, eat, drink, and be merry! "... not because we will perish tomorrow, but because we will feast forever with Christ."

Yes, eat, drink, and be merry ... in Christ!