

农历新年(Chinese New Year)

春节 (Spring Festival)



It is my pleasure to wish everyone a Happy New Year. However, as I wish for you all the best, I may not as a matter of course wish everyone success in everything they do. The reason is that through the year, people do a lot of right things that bring blessings to others and to themselves, but sometimes they simply cannot avoid doing the wrong things for which (1) they can have a

positive outcome of deriving useful life lessons or (2) the “success” of their deeds may have damaging repercussions to them or others.

Surely, I pray for all to have success in all the right things that we do, and wisdom to set right our thoughts, words and deeds that are not so good.

Thinking of Chinese New Year

We are reminded of the past (one year gone by) and looking forward to the start of a new year as the mark of a new beginning. Of course, hopefully, it is a new beginning with great promise of more happiness and prosperity.

People tend to think of prosperity in terms of material wealth instead of spiritual wealth. Material wealth does not always bring people happiness. It is easy to find news of rich people in the doldrums because of wrong decisions or poor health when all the monies they easily fill one pocket just dissipate as easily from the other pocket through unwise acts or paying for costly medical treatments. On the contrary, there are many people of limited financial means who are happy to be healthy, with enough wealth to eat an apple a day to keep the doctors away.

We face an ageing population in Singapore, and we also see the scenario of an ageing community in JCC. Unfortunately, as age catches up, energy goes down and age-related ailments creep in. It is my New Year wish that the start

of a New Year is a mark of a good new beginning that our health will improve, and that God will prosper us with enough of manna to meet our needs.

Life is commonly filled with a lot of disillusionments – uncooperative colleagues impeding service, disagreements between people creating tension, worries arising from health problems, etc. Thank God that despite all, we can wake up every day given by Him and keep the breath of life.



We should not stop at the thankfulness, but explore our heart to improve our ways with the start of each new day and of each new year, so that a new day/year is not just another day/year we see going by with celebrations that end up meaninglessly. Surely, 300+ days gone by ought to have left us a significant imprint of laughter, tears, ups and downs, camaraderie or ani-

mosity, prayers answered, grace granted and debt forgiven. It is true that we, as children of God, are unworthy of our ever-loving Heavenly Father who keeps us in His sight from time to time without fail.

In the imprint, we see the encouragements that fill our heart with thanksgiving and praise. We see the imperfectness that is part and parcel of our imperfect nature (being in the fallen state). We are all similar, aren't we? In the new year, let us remember this similarity that contributes to the fellowship among brothers and sisters on an equal standing (in being imperfect) as we do not let differences waylay and impede our spiritual progress.

Chinese New Year is more commonly called 春节 (Spring Festival) in China.

Thinking of 春节 (Spring Festival)

Our energy level should rise as we celebrate with the Song of Solomon 2:11-13.

People often associate winter with a state of coldness when lives come to a standstill, as many an-

See! The winter is past;
the rains are over and gone.
Flowers appear on the earth;
the season of singing has come,
the cooing of doves
is heard in our land.
The fig tree forms its early fruit;
the blossoming vines spread their fragrance.

Song of Solomon 2:11–13

NIV

imals cease their activities and go into hibernation. The arrival of Spring is always welcome.

Psalm 74:17 tells us that God set all the boundaries of the Earth; He made both Summer and Winter. Of course, in setting the boundaries of the earth, He also made the Autumn and Spring. “He made the moon also to serve in her season for a declaration of times, and a sign of the world. From the moon is the sign of feasts ... The month is called after her name ...”¹ He made the sun (one of the two great lights mentioned in Gen. 1:16)

Without the sun, there would be no life on Earth and no mankind. Without the moon, we wouldn't be able to determine the Spring festival. As it is, the calendar on which the Chinese decide the arrival of Spring is a lunar one; i.e., based on the rotation of the moon around the Earth.

There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens. (Ecc. 3:1) There is time for summer heat and time for winter cold. There is time for sowing and time for harvesting. “As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease.” (Gen. 8:22)

God set all the boundaries of the Earth; He set the ordering of time; and He set the borders of life on Earth, which means that that our lifetime and the boundaries of our being are in the hands of God. Instead of counting our years (which is out of our control), we ought to live every moment to the fullest and draw closer to God as we draw upon His grace for each moment.

It is not that we first loved God, but God first loved us. Due to His love, He not only created man but also created time and all things as a good provision for our life. Due to His love, He gave us His most beloved Son, Jesus Christ.

Grace is what God gives us that we don't deserve. How much faith have we in God's love? How much obedience we have to our Heavenly Father and how much love we give to our neighbours?

Jesus says, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” (John 14:15) “And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister.” (1 John 4:21)

This tells us that keeping the Lord's commands is a spin-off of love. Insofar as we are not full in our love for Jesus, this shows up in our lack of fullness in the

¹ Apocryphal Book of Ecclesiasticus

love we show to our brothers and sisters. Instead of being guilty conscious, let us see the helpful aspect of this; i.e., we see room to improve and this start of a New Year is opportunity for us to make a resolution (if we are not wont to break it) to seek higher grounds in our love for Jesus, and then we let the love for our neighbours flow naturally out of this love for our Lord. (This is not the same as trying to love our neighbours as an act to show that we love Jesus.)

Thinking of Chinese New Year or a Festival of Spring



We are on a line drawn across time. Like it or not, we are going to step into a future. Some of us may muse about the foregoing past with mixed feelings. Some rejoice in the blessedness enjoyed and seek more of it. Some ruminate with a bit of aching, but nevertheless seek to learn valuable lessons for better days ahead. Whatever your situation, what do you realise that you obtained in the year past as you count your blessings?

What example did Apostle Paul leave us?

While writing Philippians, Paul was in prison. It was a sinister environment within and without. Yet, he was full of humility; and his epistle to his brethren was filled with joy and encouragement. He wrote:

“Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.” – Philippians 3:13-14

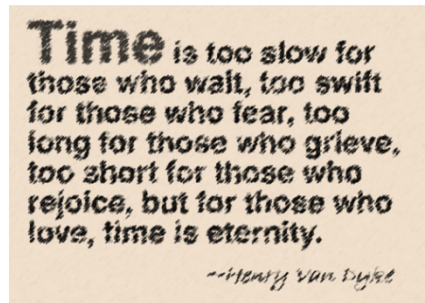
Paul was saying that he had a final goal, but he had yet to reach it. However, his mind was focused on the goal and he would not let the past weigh him down from his determined effort to move forward to achieve that precious prize that lay ahead.

Our past does hold useful lessons for us. Beneficially learning from the past is quite different from having inability to forget the unhappy things and forgive others or ourselves. Does it make anyone feel better standing on the line and always looking back instead of crossing the line from the past into the future with hope?

Paul left us a good example – to have a clear sense of forward-looking direction, to run straight to the mark to receive the rewards.

He must forget all that is in the past – the successes and the failures, the glory and the sufferings, goodwill and the persecutions – in order to keep straining forward undistracted.

Some people simply find it very difficult to forget and forgive. As a result, they keep harbouring ill-feelings towards others and do not have peace in their heart. It is not advantageous for us to be like them. As we are at the doorstep of a new year to welcome the dawn of Spring, we should take heed that the Winter is past, and the rains are over and gone. Let us open our eyes to appreciate the flowers appearing and open our ears to the cooing of doves, even though there may still be challenging circumstances for us to face up to boldly.



Time is a gift from God. Whether we see each year as 300+ days racing by or as but a season in eternity, may our time be filled with abundant blessings as we imitate the determination of Paul in looking ahead to finish the race and win the prize.

John Lee