

引言 INTRODUCTION

Today's is the last day of 2023. Do you remember any major affairs that happened in the world this year? In my upbringing, TV stations produced special news programs every December. Those shows reviewed the big local and international events which occurred that year. Those incidents could be about economic status, new records being set, deaths of famous people, key disasters, etc. As people come to a certain age, they have a general feeling of déjà vu when watching those programs. It is just like the Bible says: "There's nothing new under the sun." From the world around us, we can look at ourselves. What major things happened to you or your family this year? Perhaps there are beautiful memories you savor. But there may be misfortunes you want to forget. Someone totaled my wife's car in the summer. Later she got a new car. Then she also had a minor surgery last month. But my family received a lot of love and care from all of you. Whether good or bad things, our previous experience serves as learning moments. We hope to repeat the success we have and to avoid the same mistakes we made. Our past shapes the person we are today. The future is a blank page waiting for us to compose our life stories. For Christians, God is our author and we are His collaborators. He will lead us if we follow Him. Therefore, as we begin a new year, let us step out by faith.

解釋 EXPLANATION

1. 回顧 Look Back

In this passage, Paul first looks back to his past. He contrasts his life pursuit before and after he received Jesus. He says in verse 7: **But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.** What were Paul's previous gain? He outlines what he used to have in verses 4-6. Paul had quite a stellar resume. He was born as a pure-breed Jew. He was very knowledgeable of the Old Testament Law because he completed training to become a Pharisee. He also worked the hardest to suppress Christianity. At that time, the Jews denied Jesus as their Messiah. They thought that Jesus betrayed their traditional belief and started a new cult. Paul was among some zealous religious leader who persecuted followers of Jesus. They arrested those believers, tortured and imprisoned them. They believed that they were serving a noble cause for God. But they were wrong. God showed mercy to Paul by saving him. He revealed to Paul from a voice in heaven while he was on his way to Damascus to capture Christians. God asked Paul: "Why do you persecute me?" Then Paul realized that he had been acting against God all his life. From that experience, God completely changed Paul and chose him to become an apostle to the Gentiles. As Paul looked back, all those accomplishments he once took pride in were now counted as loss. He uses a strong word in verse 8 to describe all those merits: **Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ.** The word is "rubbish." Those valuable things Paul once cherished now became trash. Family background, education and training are all good things in themselves. However, they became worthless to Paul for two reasons. First, those qualities could not earn him salvation. Paul realized that knowing the Law and practicing the Law could never save him. Nowadays, many people falsely

believe that they can go to heaven because they are “good” people. Of course, helping others, donating to charities and being noble citizens are all good things. The problem is, those efforts and intentions can never compensate for the sins we commit. Also, God is not asking for a passing grade. He demands perfection! Who can proudly claim that they can do good in all time under all situations? God’s grace make up for our deficiency and it takes away our pride. We are not saved because we are better, richer or smarter than others. We can only thank God for His grace. The credentials Paul had were worthless in earning his salvation. Secondly, those qualities were worthless pursuit compared to knowing Christ. Look at verses 10-11: **10 That I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.** God saved Paul and called him to share the gospel to non-Jew people. From then on, his life purpose was to know Christ. He says he wants to know Christ in His suffering, death and resurrection. The focus was not to do an academic research on Jesus’ experience in the world. Paul wanted to identify with Christ in those experience. For example, Paul faced persecution as he preached the gospel. He got a taste of how Jesus felt when He was mocked and beaten by enemies, and the emotional trauma of being abandoned by fellow believers. In the process, Paul learned that he could triumph by using Jesus as his role model. Kids go through a similar pathway as they grow into adulthood. Parents wash their children’s clothes, prepare their lunch, pack their school bags and drop them off at school. However, kids must go to their classes, pay attention to the lessons, do their homework and finish their exams. Growing up is full of challenges. But kids can have an easier path if they listen to parents’ guidance and follow their examples. The mentality is: “If my dad and mom can do it, so can I.” Likewise, we can live a victorious Christian life by following our Lord who had been there and done that. We must submitted ourselves to the Father and draw strength from Him like Jesus did. Paul said that his goal was to know Christ after he was saved. We need to ask ourselves if we have the same objective in mind. We can know Jesus more by reading the Bible every day and attend church meetings. But do you know Him through your daily activities? In other words, are you sensitive to His presence in your study, work, hobbies and inter-personal relationship? Do you use Biblical principles as guidelines to make decisions? Besides knowing Jesus more, can people around you know Him through you? Every now and then you hear gospel friends say that they do not want to believe in Jesus because they cannot see how our faith affects our lives. That is something we need to reflect on. The way we speak, the manner we treat others and the values we display should help people know Jesus more. We hope that they will come to a conclusion: “I want to receive the God they believe!” From our personal life we can switch focus to our church life. Are our meetings centered on helping people know Christ? We just celebrated Christmas. We were busy preparing special programs, songs, decorations and activities. Coworkers felt exhausted. After everything was said and done, we need to ponder whether believers and non-believers alike came to know Jesus more through our effort. The same principle applies to everything else. Our kitchen crew does not only cook. They run a food ministry. Nursery coworkers do not babysit. They help young children know Jesus. Choir members do not perform their musical talents. They sing about the goodness of our Lord. Let Jesus be the main focus in all we do!

2. 仰望 Look Up

Paul looked back at his past and considered all that he had and did was worthless compared to knowing Christ. Now he looks up to the goal God sets for him. He determines to get to that

destination. He says in verses 13-14: **13 Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.** What were Paul's goal and prize that he looked up to? It was all about knowing Christ. He gradually gained more knowledge of Christ in this lifetime. While that result is fulfilling, it is limited. Paul's ultimate goal was to see Christ in glory. Then he will know the Lord completely. That eternal objective energized him. He uses a metaphor of a runner to illustrate it. Every contestant only has one goal in the mind – to win. All the preparation, diet restriction and weight-training are aiming toward victory. Once a competition has started, runners will put their full attention to the course ahead. Even peeking at the opponents behind may cause you fractions of a second. We have quite a few marathon athletes in our church. They surely know how to run a race. Sometimes, a race-track is in an urban area. But no runner will stop at a store that is having a liquidation sale or pull up at a coffee shop when smelling a sweet aroma. Those activities will distract them and slow down their pace. The only goal is to beat other competitors and win. When Paul wrote 2 Timothy 4, he understands that he is about to reach his goal. He testifies in verses 7-8: **7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.** Paul had completed his journey. He looked up to the podium in heaven, waiting to receive his trophy. There was no regret in his heart, but pure joy. He could not wait to see the Lord. It is like finally meeting a person whom you only heard of before. When I was young, there was a leisure activity of making pen-pals. It was a fun way to improve my English. After I signed up, I was assigned a girl from Italy. We wrote letters back and forth to communicate. We shared about our lives, family, school and interests. I got to know something about a person from another country. But that knowledge was quite superficial. Suppose I have enough money to buy a ticket and fly to Italy. Then I could sit down and chat with her face-to-face. Of course, that never happened. Our friendship ended abruptly. If you expand that interaction a million times, you can get a sense of how much more we can know Jesus when we see Him in heaven. Today, we can know God by reading the Bible. He reveals His nature and His works through the words. He also tells us His expectations on us. He hopes that we will walk with Him daily, avoid sinning and find opportunities to tell others about Him. In addition, God lives in the believers through the Holy Spirit. We can feel God's presence in us. However, all those knowledge and experience are limited. We are confined in a finite body and in a physical world. Those boundaries will be lifted when we meet God in glory. You see, Christian life from start to finish is about knowing Christ. It is not a religion; it is a relationship. We do not only believe in some doctrines. We connect with the Lord. Unfortunately, some believers find reading the Bible and coming to the church as boring and even a waste of time. Perhaps they treat their faith as a means to get what they want. They go to God only when they have certain needs. In exchange, perhaps they donate some money as a compensation to God's service to them. I hope that attitude does not summarize your belief. Receiving Jesus is similar to getting married. Your spouse will be very sad if you married her because she can wash, cook and give birth to babies. He will be heart-broken if you are only looking for a permanent meal ticket, a free handyman to fix things and a credit card for shopping. Marriage is about getting to know the person you love. The same is true about becoming a Christian. Paul looked up to the final goal of knowing Christ perfectly. Is that your goal too? If so, how does that final reward shape your current life? Just like Paul did, we are on a lifetime race. We are not comparing with other believers and see who read more Scriptures, who pray longer, offer more

money or win more souls to Christ. We are competing against our tendency to be complacent and even to fall back in our faith. Sometimes we say to ourselves: “Why bother? My salvation is confirmed. I’ll just take it easy and wait for my turn to go to heaven. Let other enthusiastic believers serve in the church and evangelize to others. I’ll just keep my involvement minimum. I’ll go to church when I’m free. I’ll pray to God when I need something from Him.” Brothers and sisters: do not just hang around; keep running. Continue to grow in your knowledge of the Lord and your love for Him. Encourage one another, especially those who have retreated to the sideline.

結論 CONCLUSION

God will lead us if we follow Him. Let us step out by faith as we begin a new year. God has been doing some amazing things in your life. I recommend that you spend some time to look back at this year. Respond to Him with thanks. Then look up to the goal God sets for you in the new year. Trust Him and walk with Him. God has been good to you, and He is gracious to our church too. At the Council meeting two weeks ago, coworkers shared some exciting things God did in our church. One sister came up with a list. Let me share something she wrote.

Brand-new or renewed ministries:

- Our roof was replaced
- We rolled out a pickleball ministry on Sunday afternoon
- We went back to the Student Life Camp after the pandemic years
- Our children’s choir has a new name called “Kingdom Kids”
- Some members received training on vocal techniques and sight-reading in the summer, those efforts culminated to the restarting of church choir

God’s continual blessings:

- Our church has a stable finance and there is no mortgage
- We continue to partially support seven local and overseas missionaries
- Some members participated in local mission efforts at the food bank and others collaborated with Howard Campbell at the Memphis Union Mission
- God brought 45 newcomers this year, fifteen of whom continue to attend our meetings
- Five brothers and sisters were baptized in the spring and fall
- There were one wedding and two funerals

I am sure you can think of other items. I am praying and hoping that we will have a longer list this time next year! God will continue to use our church in 2024. We must march forward as a team. I hope that every member will find a place to participate. We always need people to lead, teach, clean, cook, care and sing, etc. Will you join us to serve? Go to our leaders or come to me if you see a need or if God nudges your heart. We talk about knowing Christ in this message. Make that your goal too. Motivate each other in your small group to read the Bible daily and come here every Friday and Sunday. Share how you experience the Lord in your life. If we become stronger and more mature as individual believers, then so will our church as a whole.

引言 INTRODUCTION

今天是 2023 年的最後一天，你還記得今年世界上發生了什麼大事嗎？在我的成長過程中，電視台每年十二月都會製作特別新聞節目。這些節目回顧當年發生的重大本地和國際事件。這些事件可能是有關經濟、創新紀錄、名人去世、重大災難等。當人們到了一定年齡，觀看這些節目時，總會有一種似曾相識的感覺。正如聖經所說：「日光之下並無新事」。從周遭的世界，我們可以看看自己。今年你或你的家人發生了什麼重大事件？或許你對一些事情有美好的回憶，但可能有些不如意的事情你想要忘記的。今年夏天我太太的車子被人撞壞，但後來她買了一輛新車。上個月她做了一個小手術，但我的家人感受到你們的愛心和關懷。無論好事或壞事，我們過去的經驗都是學習的機會。我們希望重覆所取得的成功，並避免以前的錯誤。我們的過去塑造了今天的我們。未來是一張白紙，等待著我們去譜寫人生的故事。對基督徒來說，神是我們的作者，我們是祂的伙伴。如果我們跟隨神，祂就會引領我們。因此，讓我們憑著信心邁進新的一年。

解釋 EXPLANATION

1. 回顧 Look Back

在這段經文中，保羅首先回顧了他的過去。他對比接受耶穌之前和之後的人生追求。他在第 7 節中說：**只是我先前以為與我有益的，我現在因基督都當作有損的。**以前對保羅有益處的是什麼？他在第 4-6 節中回顧了他曾經擁有的東西。保羅有著相當出色的履歷。他出生時就是正統的猶太人。他非常熟悉舊約律法，因為他被訓練成為法利賽人。他也竭盡全力鎮壓基督信仰。當時，猶太人否認耶穌是救世主。他們認為耶穌背叛了他們的傳統信仰並開創了新的邪教。保羅是其中一位熱心迫害基督徒的宗教領袖。他們逮捕、虐待並監禁那些信徒。他們相信他們是為神大發熱心。但他們搞錯了。神憐憫保羅，拯救了他。當保羅前往大馬士革抓捕基督徒時，神從天上向保羅講話。神問保羅：「你為什麼逼迫我？」然後保羅才明白他一生都在與神作對。在那次經歷中，神徹底改變了保羅，並揀選他成為外邦人的使徒。當保羅回顧過去時，他曾經引以為傲的成就現在都被視為一文不值。他在第 8 節中用了一個強烈的詞語來描述那些優點：**不但如此，我也將萬事當作有損的，因我以認識我主基督耶穌為至寶。我為他已經丟棄萬事，看作糞土，為要得着基督。**那個字就是「糞土」，意思是垃圾。那些保羅曾經珍惜的履歷現在都變成了垃圾。家庭背景、教育和專業訓練本身都是好東西。然而，由於兩個原因，它們對保羅來說變得毫無價值。首先，這些優勢無法使他得救。保羅了解到認識律法和遵行律法無法救

他。如今，許多人錯誤地認為他們可以上天堂，因為他們是「好」人。當然，幫助別人、捐款給慈善機構、成為良好公民都是好事。問題是，這些努力無法彌補我們所犯下的罪。而且，神不只要我們及格。他要求的完美！試問誰能在任何時候、任何情況下都做好事？神的恩典彌補了我們的不足，並除去了我們的驕傲。我們得救不是因為我們比別人更好、更富有或更聰明。我們只能感謝神的恩典。保羅所擁有的經歷無法換取他的救恩。其次，與認識基督相比，追求這些成就是毫無價值的。請看第 10 至 11 節：**10 使我認識基督，曉得他復活的大能，並且曉得和他一同受苦，效法他的死，11 或者我也得以從死裏復活。**神拯救了保羅並呼召他向非猶太人傳福音。從那時起，他的人生目標就是要認識基督。他說他想認識基督的受苦、死和復活。重點不是對耶穌在世上的經歷進行學術研究。保羅希望在那些經驗中與基督認同。例如，保羅在傳福音時面臨迫害。他嚐到了耶穌被敵人嘲笑和毆打時的感受，以及被信徒同伴遺棄的創傷。在這個過程中，保羅了解到，如果他以耶穌為榜樣，他就能夠得勝。孩子在成長過程中也經歷類似的過程。父母給孩子洗衣服、準備午餐、收拾書包並送他們到學校。然而，孩子們必須去上課、專心聽課、做作業並完成考試。成長充滿挑戰。但如果孩子聽從父母的指導並效法他們的榜樣，他們的道路就會更容易。其中的心態是：「如果我爸爸和媽媽能做到，我也能做到。」同樣，我們可以透過跟隨主的榜樣來過得勝的生活，因為祂在世上也曾經體會我們的困難。我們必須像耶穌一樣順服天父並從祂那裡支取力量。保羅說他得救後的目標是認識基督。我們需要問自己是否有同樣的目標。我們可以透過每天閱讀聖經和參加教會聚會來更多認識耶穌。但你有否透過日常活動認識他？換句話說，你在學習、工作、休閒活動、人際關係中敏銳神的同在嗎？你有沒有使用聖經原則來作決定？除了更認識耶穌之外，你周圍的人能透過你認識耶穌嗎？你可能曾經聽過福音朋友說他們不想相信耶穌，因為他們看不到我們的信仰如何影響我們的生活。這一點值得我們反思。我們說話的方式、對人的態度以及價值觀應該幫助人們更多地認識耶穌。我們希望他們得出一個結論：「我也要接受他們所相信的神！」我們可以從個人生活轉向教會生活。我們的聚會是否集中在幫助人們認識基督？我們剛剛慶祝了聖誕節。我們忙著準備特別的聚會、音樂、裝飾和活動。同工們都感到疲憊不堪。當忙完之後，我們需要思考信徒和非信徒是否都藉著我們的努力更認識耶穌。同樣的原則也適用於其他事情。我們的廚房同工不僅是做飯，他們是在負責飲食事工。兒童事工的老師們不是提供托兒服務，他們是在幫助小朋友認識耶穌。詩班的成員不是在表現個人的音樂才華，而是在歌頌主的美善。讓耶穌成為我們所做一切的焦點！

2. 仰望 Look Up

保羅回顧他的過去，他認為他過去的經歷和成就與認識基督相比毫無價值。現在他仰望神為他設定的目標。他決心要達到那個終點。他在 13-14 節說：**13 弟兄們，我不是以為自己已經得着了；我只有一件事，就是忘記背後，努力面前的，14 向**

着標竿直跑，要得神在基督耶穌裏從上面召我來得的獎賞。保羅的目標和他所期待的獎賞是什麼？他的目標和獎賞都是認識基督。他一生對基督逐漸有更多的認識。雖然他感到滿足，但那個成果是有限的。保羅的最終目標是要在榮耀中看見基督，到時候他就能完全認識主。這個永恆的目標激勵著他。他用跑步作為比喻說明這一點。每位參賽者心中只有一個目標，就是獲勝。所有的準備、飲食控制和體能訓練都是為了勝利。比賽開始後，選手會全神貫注於前面的跑道。就算連回頭看後面的對手也會浪費零點幾秒的時間。我們教會裡有不少馬拉松健將，他們清楚比賽的戰略。有時候，跑道位於市區。但沒有任何運動員會看到清倉大減價的商店停下來，或是在聞到香氣時停在咖啡店。那些事情會分散注意力並且減慢步伐。選手唯一的目標是打敗其他對手並且獲勝。當保羅寫提摩太後書第 4 章時，他明白他即將到達終點。他在 7-8 節作見證說：7 那美好的仗我已經打過了，當跑的路我已經跑盡了，所信的道我已經守住了。8 從此以後，有公義的冠冕為我存留，就是按着公義審判的主到了那日要賜給我的；不但賜給我，也賜給凡愛慕他顯現的人。保羅已經完成了他的旅程。他抬頭仰望天上的頒獎台，等待領取獎賞。他的心裡沒有任何遺憾，只有喜樂。他迫不及待地想要見主的面。就像你終於見到一個你以前只聽過的人。我在年輕的時候有交筆友。我認為那是提高英語水平的一種好玩的方式。報名之後，我被分配了一位來自義大利的女孩。我們便來回寫信來溝通。我們分享自己的生活、家庭、學校和興趣。我對一個來自另一個國家的人有了一些了解。但那些知識非常膚淺。假設我有足夠的錢買一張機票飛往義大利，然後我就可以坐下來和她面對面聊天了。當然，那從未發生過。我們的友誼不久便結束了。如果你將這種互動擴大一百萬倍，你會稍為了解，當我們在天上看到耶穌時，我們可以更認識祂。今天，我們可以透過閱讀聖經來認識神。祂藉著文字顯示祂的性情和作為。神也告訴我們祂對我們的期望。祂希望我們每天與祂同行，避免犯罪並把握機會向別人傳福音。此外，神也藉著聖靈住在信徒裡面。我們可以感受到神就住在我們裡面。然而，所有這些知識和經驗都是不足的。我們住在有限的身體和物質世界中。當我們在榮耀中遇見神時，這些界限就會被消除。因此，基督徒的生活從頭到尾都是為了認識基督。它不是一種宗教；它是一重關係。我們不只接受一些教義，我們乃是與主連結。很可惜，有些信徒覺得讀聖經和去教會很無聊，甚至是浪費時間。也許他們將信仰視為獲得自己想要的東西的手段。只有當他們有某些需要時，他們才會去找神。作為交換，他們也許會奉獻一些錢，作為給神的服務費。我希望這不是你的心態。接受耶穌就像結婚一樣。如果你娶太太是因為她會洗衣服、做飯、生孩子，她肯定會非常傷心。如果妳嫁給老公只是想要一張長期飯票、一個免費的修理工和一張購物的信用卡，他也會心碎的。婚姻是為了認識你所愛的人。成為基督徒也是如此。保羅的最終目標是完全認識基督。這也是你的目標嗎？如果是的話，將來的獎賞如何塑造你目前的生活？就像保羅一樣，我們的人生就是一場賽跑。我們不是與其他信徒比較，看看誰讀了更多的聖經，誰祈禱的時間更長，奉獻了更多的錢，或者誰帶領更多人信主。我們正在與貪圖安逸甚至信仰倒退進行競賽。有時我們會對自己說：「隨隨便便就行了吧！反正我已經得救了。我就看什麼時候輪到

我上天堂吧。讓其他熱心的信徒在教會服事和向別人傳福音。我會保持低調。我有空的時候會去教會。如果我需要什麼，我便向神祈禱。」弟兄姊妹們：不要閒站；繼續奔跑。繼續增長你對主的認識和對祂的愛。和弟兄姐妹互相激勵，尤其是那些停在一旁的人。

結論 CONCLUSION

如果我們跟隨神，祂就會引領我們。讓我們憑著信心邁進新的一年。神在你的生命中做了一些奇妙的事。我建議大家花點時間回顧這一年，並以感謝來回應神。在新的一年里，仰望神為你設定的目標，信靠祂並與祂同行。神祝福了你，神也給我們教會許多恩惠。在兩週前的同工會議中，同工們分享神在我們教會所做的一些令人興奮的事情。一位姐妹列出了一些項目。讓我分享她寫的幾樣事情。

全新或更新的事工：

- 教會的屋頂被更換了
- 我們推出了主日下午的匹克球事工
- 疫情過後，青少年們回到了學生的夏令營
- 我們的兒童詩班有一個新名字，叫做「國度兒童」
- 一些成員在夏天接受音樂訓練，然後他們重新成立教會的詩班

神不斷的祝福：

- 教會的財務狀況穩定，而且沒有房貸
- 我們繼續部分支持七位本地和海外的宣教士
- 有些弟兄姐妹參加本地食物存庫的服事；另外有部份成員與 Campbell 弟兄合作，到流浪漢收容所報佳音
- 神今年帶來 45 位新朋友，其中有 15 位繼續參加我們的聚會
- 五位弟兄姐妹在春季和秋季接受浸禮
- 今年有一場婚禮和兩次追思禮拜

我相信你還能想到其他項目。我禱告並期望明年這個時候我們會有更長的清單！神會在 2024 年繼續使用我們的教會，我們必須同心努力。希望每位成員都能找到自己參與的位置。我們一直都需要人來帶領、教導、清潔、做飯、關顧和唱詩等。你願意加入服事行列嗎？如果你察覺到教會有某方面的需要或是神給你特別的感動，你可以去找同工或來找我談。今天的信息提到認識基督。你可以把它定為你的目標。在小組中互相激勵成員每天閱讀聖經，並每週五和週日來聚會。分享你如何在生命中經歷主。如果個別信徒的屬靈生命更強壯、更成熟，那麼教會的整體也會如此。