

## February 19<sup>th</sup> Sermon given by Jovan

**STORY 1:** Gleaner article published in January 2017 The head of the Centre for Investigation of Sexual Offences and Child Abuse (CISOCA), Enid Ross-Stewart, told a committee of the nation's Parliament yesterday that pastors and policemen - two groups in which the nation places great trust - are among the main 'high-profile' perpetrators of sexual offences against children.

This revelation, according to a senior Christian pastor, is another example of the breakdown of values in Jamaica.

Ross-Stewart did not give much data on the number of cops and gospel preachers implicated in the sex offences, and the Reverend Garnet Roper, president of the Jamaica Theological Seminary, says that the data are necessary.

But he said that the abuse of children requires attention. "Sexual abuse of minors is a deeply entrenched social and psychological problem. It reflects deterioration in the family structure; it reflects deterioration in the psychology of men." But, he said that the police should not "cherry-pick" cases to pursue.

**STORY 2:** Ian Boyne article in Gleaner published March, 2013

I had always wondered how so many persons could be so dumb and inexplicably stupid to be scammed by our lotto crooks until I heard the debate in Parliament and saw clearly the connection between lotto scamming and our information technology sector.

The scoundrels have such intimate details of people's lives and activities, obviously gleaned from contacts within our MoBay call centres, that it is not totally surprising why they are believed.

The lotto scam highlights several things which are wrong with us and acts as a mirror to our soul. Here we have an industry with vast potential to employ many relatively low-skilled people as well as those at the high end. American businesses which are going to India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, the Philippines and Barbados could be coming here.

FEEDING BLING CULTURE

Lotto scamming feeds into our frenzy for the bling lifestyle, the quick money. It also highlights muddled thinking and reflects our moral bankruptcy. When lotto scamming can be marketed as reparation for slavery and colonialism, you know we are in need of a moral compass.

**STORY 3:** Then our bishop Howard Gregory wrote in June last year about the outstanding Anglican and man of God: Enos Nuttall: We have come together on this day as members of the Diocese of Jamaica and the Cayman Islands and as citizens of this nation to commemorate the anniversary of the death of Archbishop Enos Nuttall. And the question may be asked, why should we bother to have such a celebration regarding someone who has been so long dead when we have so many contemporary issues and concerns to which to direct our attention? Apart from being the longest-serving diocesan bishop, having served in that position for 36 years, from 1880 to his death in 1916, his death is being commemorated firstly because of his outstanding contribution to the development of the Anglican Church in Jamaica and in the wider province, and secondly, because of the leadership role he played in the economic, social and educational development of this country.

Particularly outstanding was the role he played in the rebuilding of Kingston and other parts of the island after the 1907 earthquake, as he was the moving spirit behind the reconstruction work at a time of inertia of the Government of the day.

The inspiration behind Bishop Gregory's message was from (Nehemiah 2:17-18): which reads:

Then I said to them, "You see the trouble we are in, how Jerusalem lies in ruins with its gates burned. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, so that we may no longer suffer disgrace". I told them that the hand of my God had been gracious upon me, and also the words that the king had spoken to me. Then they said, "Let us start building!"

And that is precisely the message I want us to focus on this- building and redemption.

This morning, one of our scripture readings is from 1 Corinthians 3: 10-11 which reads: According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and another man is building upon it. Let each man take care how he builds upon it. 11 For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. (Revised Standard Version).

We heard from Boyne, we heard from the Gleaner news story and we heard from Bishop Gregory about matters relating to foundation and building – you may argue destruction, too. But it's a foundation that is not some distant, foreign concept that we absolutely cannot relate to.

The foundation each spoke about was related to Jamaica the rock and the builders, we the people living on that rock. We are Christians and while we respect the diversity in beliefs we proclaim as we will do after I'm finished that we believe in God, the Father almighty, Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord and the Holy Spirit.

And because we choose to believe in that mystery, we have sought to order our lives using the Christian principles. But through Boyne, the Gleaner and Gregory, we are reminded that we do not always build right. Yes, we put things together and we construct but the end result many times is not what we expected.

And so, we could understand Paul's reminder and warning to the Corinthians about building first themselves, their community, their church and their society. To do all of that, they must ensure they are firmly planted on Christ. He's the most important ingredient to constructing anything.

Historians generally agree that Paul wrote to the Corinthians after hearing of the various problems afflicting the new Christian church he had worked so hard to set up. Bible Lessons International said in its commentary that there were factions in the church with misunderstanding of Christian leadership. There were also issues with immorality and Christian freedom.

But Paul, even though he showed signs of impatience, made it very clear that to fix any of the problems and to grow as a body, the supremacy of Christ, who has been accepted as Lord and Saviour, must be acknowledged. That acknowledgement comes through acknowledging our downfalls, our weaknesses and our sins and failings.

It also means being very clear on our objective and why we want what we want and how we are prepared to get what we want.

This brings me to the matter of redemption. Who is a better symbol of redemption, than Paul, the crusader turned apostle.

Paul was practical. In the earlier stories, Boyne while lamenting moral bankruptcy, Roper while admitting to the failures of values and our Bishop who spoke of a Bishop who stood up for justice, we do not and should not get the sense of finality that the human condition is irredeemable. By that I mean to the extent that goodness cannot ultimately prevail and the word of God can be fatally discarded. Indeed, Matthew 5: 8 says For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished."

Christ shall always prevail, and through the Gospel, we have that renewed opening to seek redemption and obtain grace. Paul makes it clear in First Corinthians 1 verse 30 that God is the source of our life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption.

Ultimately, redemption we are advised can be found through a conscious effort to rebuild.

Many of us do not get the chance to repair a broken relationship but we are reminded that atonement in Christ is always available. Recognising Christ for what He is and establishing him at the centre of our lives makes it much easier to construct a life pleasing to the Lord.

Building on a foundation of God's love also means, we deciding to meet God where we are. Wherever we are - morally, spiritually, financially, physically and mentally.

Paul did not start the journey at Corinth with newly made, unstained human beings. The people who became converts were people with a storied past and that is borne out in the questions and troubles that confronted the early church. But no doubt as Paul would know, Jesus' God is always in the rebuilding business, he's always in the restoration business, and he's always in the redemption business.

A call to redemption or rebuilding is the message I would like us to take away this morning. And that to me is one of the central messages of Paul to the Corinthians. It is also the central message to be applied to the newspaper stories. The redemption we seek every minute of every day demands acknowledgement that Christ alone is our foundation. It demands our positive participation in the process of healing and restoration for ourselves, communities, country and our world. The redemption we seek demands that we gladden our hearts at the hope in the resurrection and use our every step to infuse hope in our brothers and sisters at the mercy of God.

Amen.