

**Theme: Have no anxiety – God is in charge**

**Lessons: Philippians 4: 4-13**

**Isaiah: 25: 1-9**

**How to strengthen resilience to remain on the path, repel the competing interests**

**Focus: Spiritual Preparation**

**By Jovan Johnson**

Historical context: Paul was imprisoned, allegedly in Rome, when he wrote an Epistle to the Church in Philippi. Imprisoned, he experienced one of the darkest moments of his life, a reminder of his own mortality. Yet, in the letter, he sought to reaffirm an everlasting hope to be found through faith in Jesus Christ. In essence, he reminded the congregation in Philippi of the long suffering, the hurt, the sadness that are all features of human life. However, he went further to note that through nurturing a relationship with God, the tragedy of the human condition will not be forever.

In much the same way Paul was confronted by personal darkness and faith-changing circumstances, we, the young people of today are cornered, confronted and confounded by our own 21<sup>st</sup> Century prison or darkness. By youth, I not only refer to those of us here today, nor just in Jamaica but the global youth population, including those who are Christians. In fact, the challenges spread across cultures, religions and geographical boundaries.

How have these issues manifested themselves? We in Jamaica face an intensified moral, social and political crisis. From the youths' perspective, many of us are having problems locating ourselves in each crisis, trying to find that oasis where we not only can attempt to survive but also to live. We are faced with problems that manifest themselves in a depressed economy, the increasing lack of jobs, and burdensome student loans. I am always amazed that it is celebrated, and so it should be, that more Jamaicans are qualifying for tertiary studies but what is hushed is that more and more CANNOT afford tertiary studies. More and more of our youths are perpetrators [or procrastinators?]

of time in an increasingly sexualised society. More and more one wonders if childhood and youth are not fast disappearing.

But amid all of the personal darkness and faith-changing circumstances we face, I put it to you that preparation, or the lack of it, is a major cause. Meeting the challenges, which we must, requires that we have a sturdy belief in God, rooted in a spiritual understanding of our journey and purpose here on earth. Paul, as demonstrated in the letter to the Philippians, had an unshakeable belief in God, nurtured by his spiritual relationship. Likewise, our birth, infancy, childhood and the other stages of development, all prepare us for adulthood and the various responsibilities that come with it. Notice when certain behaviours are displayed, for example if a child misbehaves in public, one of the assertions is that the child was not brought up properly. In this case, it would be that the child was not prepared properly to display accepted public behaviour. It is much the same as how we treat the personal darkness and faith-changing circumstances which confront us as young people. Our response demonstrates how well we have been prepared or are being prepared.

For us as Christian youth, while the society, through socialisation, prepares us for life in the present, we are fundamentally being directed by the Holy Bible, and other teachings of the Church, to prepare ourselves for the present as well as the day of judgement. The Bible is full of illustrations of preparation for various circumstances, whether for Christ's coming as Mathew 24 speaks of it, or, to defend our faith as in the case of the First Letter of Peter, or, our call to repentance as in the case of St. Luke 13.

Spiritual preparation for difficulties in tuition funding, spiritual preparation for unemployment, spiritual preparation in the midst of crime and violence, spiritual preparation for almost any eventuality is the fundamental call of the Christian. Such preparation means acknowledging our

circumstances while exhorting us to nurture a relationship through prayer and deepening belief to know that we do not have to be overwhelmed by our earthly challenges.

I know many things are easier said than done, but as Christian young people, we also know that we deal with a higher calling that requires us to elevate our understanding as challenging as that may be. Paul was able to maintain his higher calling/belief as he remained locked away, not knowing whether the next day he would be executed. We can prepare ourselves spiritually for the present and the future by following Paul's recommendation to have no anxiety but through prayer and supplication - the ultimate form of worship - to take on the personal darkness and faith-changing circumstances of the present. Notice what Paul says after that, he says the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Jesus Christ. Paul adds that he has learned the SCERET of facing hunger and plenty, abundance and want! He has faced all that and so should we as there is nothing that says we cannot rise above our circumstances as St. Paul did in his time.

So my fellow youth worshippers here today, when we leave here shortly, the assignments, the personal problems and challenges will not just disappear. However, WE will go away with a renewed vigour to become spiritually prepared to deal with all we face. We have to remind ourselves also that we are not alone, that we have friends, family, the Chapel community here, all of which God has placed on our journey. And through those persons He's hoping that we will make that choice, like Paul, to cling to his mercy even as we face the highs and lows of lives. I encourage all of us to have no anxiety because God is in charge. Amen.