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CELEBRATING JAMAICANS AT
HOME AND ABROAD
PSALM 33:1-22

**National Independence Service
Calvary Baptist, Montego Bay, St. James
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Introduction

To celebrate someone is simply to honour that person, and for the most part, that celebration is in the form of an event. Usually, the honouring of someone is the result of an achievement. An achievement which, in our eyes, is deserving of public recognition. Some feat which we believe should not go unnoticed because of its sterling quality.

Theme

But the theme we have today has expanded, in my view, that concept as it calls for the celebration of all Jamaicans. It calls us to celebrate every Jamaican, for the simple reason that he/she is a Jamaican. A celebration devoid of any particular feat.

Some may think this is a “watering down” of the purpose for a celebration, but I think not, because for most of us, birthdays bring big celebrations, regardless of whether there be a specific achievement. Herein

lies the genius of the theme: Every human being, made in the image of God, **MUST** be celebrated.

Oftentimes, the birth of a new born is celebrated, regardless of status or creed. There are **NO** prerequisites for this celebration. Yet, as the child grows, there is almost a refusal to honour and lift high this human being because, in our eyes, he/she has fallen from the position of honour, not because he/she has disgraced him/herself but because he/she needs now to prove him/herself worthy of honour by doing some great feat. What a tragedy!

The Scripture

The Christian understanding, however, clearly stated in Galatians 3:28 turns things on its head, for it declares that all the categories that divide men have been removed in Jesus and equality marks our way. We are equal, not in what we possess but in the fact that we are humans made in God's image. Without this understanding of equality, we will **NEVER** be able to celebrate all Jamaicans.

The lesson from the Psalm, read earlier, is the text for consideration. Psalm 33 is a typical Psalm of Praise that celebrates God. Verses 1-3, calls the people to celebrate God; verses 4-19 give the reasons for the celebration and the final verses provide a conclusion.

The call to celebrate the Lord, invites the people to do three things: Praise Him, rejoice in Him and sing to Him. I would want to suggest that when we celebrate a Jamaican, these kinds of actions would also be appropriate. Praise, rejoice and sing are all in the tense of command and therefore the people of Israel are commanded to celebrate God.

Reasons

This celebration of God (v.4-19) is predicated on:

1. His creation of the world by His words, echoing the creation story of Genesis one. His creative work is based on the faithful work and upright word of God. God, being a lover of righteousness and justice has filled the earth with His steadfast love. Thus, the Earth must *stand in awe of God* (verse 8). Notice, the emphasis is on God's character and not on His deeds, since His deeds flow from His character. Thus, our honouring of every Jamaican must be based on the fact of whom he/she is more than what he/she has achieved. Thus, I am declaring that being in God's image with the potential of reflecting Him must be the basis for celebration.
2. His activities in the history of the world must be recognised. What is clearly seen in the text is that God's activities are for the blessing of man. His celebration of man, if you please, is based on His desire to bless man.

Verse 12 declares that the nation that makes God, lord/master must be blessed, because such a nation works to fulfil God's plan. I believe that through the words of our National Anthem, Pledge and Song, our forefathers declared that this nation is a nation given to the fear of God. These national expressions are like covenants made with God; and as such we have enjoyed unqualified blessings in many ways. Many will recall how often hurricanes that were headed towards us, certain to hit, turned away at the last minute; many know of our enormous impact on the world in spite of our size and in academia our law students have dazzled the world, as year after year they outclass the Harvards, the Yales, and the like in the law debates. These are but a few of the achievements of this country that say that God has been on our side. It is Genesis

12:3 that declares that God desires more than anything else to bless people, or if you may, to celebrate people. He declared through Abraham that, “all the peoples of the Earth will be blessed” and John in Revelation 7:9 declared the fulfilment of this promise as he wrote that people from every nation, tribe, people and language were standing before the throne in white robes. This utterance signals the greatest blessing that can be achieved by any human being – life with God forevermore. So God desires to celebrate every Jamaican, those at home and those abroad.

But we, as a nation, have moved away from the place of blessing. Rather than the celebration of each Jamaican, we have worked to destroy our fellowman. Thus, we are filled with actions that show disregard for life and our fellow Jamaican: Injustice, intolerance, indiscipline and insolence. I therefore call us to return to the declaration of our forefathers and celebrate every Jamaican.

The Christian way turns things around like we read in the second lesson (Matthew 5: 33-45) today. We need to respond to those who hurt us with love. We need rather than to honour and celebrate only those who achieve, celebrate all by helping them to achieve. We will never be able to do that until we take Galatians 3:28 seriously. We need to know that we are all equal. I know this is hard to accept because we always want to believe that we are a little better because of what we have, where we were born and with whom we are associated. But, we are equal because we are all human beings made in God’s image and everything else we have represents privileges he have been given. These

don't make us better people, as the world teaches, but they *may* help us to cope better with the difficulties of life. We must come understand that the extras we have, we have to bless others, who are equal to us but less privileged than us. We **MUST** decide to honour every Jamaican by helping each person within our reach to achieve.

Verses 13-19 declare that God keeps watch over the Earth. Verse 18 declares that God's blessed action is upon those who fear Him.

If one fears God, then one must have regard for humanity. Jesus in His demonstration of what humans should be, never failed to other celebrate and honour people. He oftentimes celebrated those who were otherwise disregarded by humanity and He even earned the criticism of those 'looking on' but that did not deter him from honouring others. He kept on celebrating all of humanity. Yes! The call for us today and for this independence celebration, indeed all of the rest of our lives is to celebrate every Jamaican wherever he/she may be. Even in the face of criticism, like Jesus, we must be committed to help others at any cost, for it is in this that we will honour our fellowman.

Conclusion

Finally the Psalm ends with a prayer for God's unfailing love to rest upon His people (verse 22). I think, if we are going to be able to celebrate every Jamaican, then the unfailing love of God must also rest upon us. And, as we pray continually for God's unfailing love for others, we will see ourselves as the instruments through whom God will honour and celebrate others. Thus, we will be able to look outside of ourselves and recognise that each man born

must be celebrated, and therefore we need to bestow honour on those we can reach.

Our national pledge is right: we **MUST** stand for justice, brotherhood and peace, being generous and honest in all our dealings.