

Sermon 16: My word is the guarantee of my promise ...

Delivered when allegiance was sworn to him at Medina

(من كلام له (عليه السلام

لما بويع بالمدينة

وفيهما يخبر الناس بعلمه بما تؤول إليه أحوالهم وفيها يقسمهم إلى أقسام

The responsibility for what I say is guaranteed and I am answerable for it. He to whom experiences have clearly shown the past exemplary punishments (given by Allah to peoples) is prevented by piety from falling into doubts. You should know that the same troubles have returned to you which existed when the Prophet was first sent.

By Allah who sent the Prophet with faith and truth, you will be severely subverted, bitterly shaken as in sieving and fully mixed as by spooning in a cooking pot till your low persons become high and high ones become low, those who were behind would attain forward positions and those who were forward would become backward. By Allah, I have not concealed a single word or spoken any lie and I had been informed of this event and of this time.

نَمَّتِي بِمَا أَقُولُ رَهِينَةً وَأَنَا بِهِ زَعِيمٌ : إِنَّ مَنْ صَرَّحَتْ لَهُ الْعِبْرُ عَمَّا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ مِنَ الْمَثَلَاتِ، حَجَزَهُ التَّقْوَى عَنْ تَقَحُّمِ الشُّبُهَاتِ. أَلَا وَإِنَّ بَلِيَّتَكُمْ قَدْ عَادَتْ كَهَيْئَتِهَا يَوْمَ بَعَثَ اللَّهُ نَبِيَّهُ (صلى الله عليه وآله)، وَالَّذِي بَعَثَهُ بِالْحَقِّ لِيُتَبَلَّنَ بِلَبْلَةٍ، وَلِتُغْرَبَلْنَ غَرَبَلَةً، وَلِتَسَاطُنَّ سَوْطَ الْقَدْرِ، حَتَّى يَعُودَ أَسْفَلُكُمْ أَعْلَاكُمْ، وَأَعْلَاكُمْ أَسْفَلَكُمْ، وَلَيْسَبِقَنَّ سَابِقُونَ كَانُوا قَصْرُوا، وَلِيَقْصِرَنَّ سَبَاقُونَ كَانُوا سَبَقُوا. وَاللَّهِ مَا كَتَمْتُ وَشَمَّةً، وَلَا كَذَبْتُ كَذِبَةً، وَلَقَدْ نُبِّئْتُ بِهَذَا الْمَقَامِ وَهَذَا الْيَوْمِ

Beware that sins are like unruly horses on whom their riders have been placed and their reins have been let loose so that they would jump with them in Hell. Beware that piety is like trained horses on whom the riders have been placed with the reins in their hands, so that they would take the riders to Heaven. There is right and wrong and there are followers for each. If wrong dominates, it has (always) in the past been so, and if truth goes down that too has often occurred. It seldom happens that a thing that lags behind comes forward.

أَلَا وَإِنَّ الْخَطَايَا خَيْلٌ شُمُسٌ حُمِلَ عَلَيْهَا أَهْلُهَا، وَخُلِعَتْ لُجْمُهَا، فَتَقَحَّمَتْ بِهِمْ فِي النَّارِ

أَلَا وَإِنَّ التَّقْوَى مَطَايَا دُؤُلٌ(2)، حُمِلَ عَلَيْهَا أَهْلُهَا، وَأُعْطُوا أَزِمَتَهَا، فَأَوْرَدَتْهُمْ الْجَنَّةَ

!حَقٌّ وَبَاطِلٌ، وَلِكُلِّ أَهْلٍ، فَلَيْتَنُ أَمْرَ الْبَاطِلِ لَقَدِيمًا فَعَلَّ، وَلَيْتَنُ قَلَّ الْحَقُّ لَرُبَّمَا وَعَلَّ، وَلَقَلَّمَا أَدْبَرَ شَيْءٌ فَأَقْبَلَ

ash-Sharif ar-Radi says: In this small speech there is more beauty than can be appreciated, and the quantity of amazement aroused by it is more than the appreciation accorded to it. Despite what we have stated it has so many aspects of eloquence that cannot be expressed nor can anyone reach its depth, and no one can understand what I am saying unless one has attained this art and known its details.

No one appreciates it except those who know (Qur'an, 29:43)

قال السيد الشريف: وأقول: إن في هذا الكلام الأدنى من مواقع الاحسان ملا تبلغه مواقع الاستحسان، وإن حظ العجب منه أكثر من حظ العجب به، وفيه - مع الحال التي وصفنا - زوائد من الفصاحة لا يقوم بها لسان، ولا يطلع فجبها إنسان، ولا يعرف ما أقوله إلا من ضرب في هذه الصناعة بحق، وجرى فيها على عرق، (وما يعقلها إلا العالمون).

From the same Sermon

ومن هذه الخطبة

[وفيها يقسم الناس إلى ثلاثة أصناف]

He who has heaven and hell in his view has no other aim. He who attempts and acts quickly, succeeds, while the seeker who is slow may also entertain hope, and he who falls short of action faces destruction in Hell. On right and left there are misleading paths. Only the middle way is the (right) path which is the

Everlasting Book and the traditions of the Prophet. From it the *sunnah* has spread out and towards it is the eventual return.

شُغِلَ مِنَ الْجَنَّةِ وَالنَّارِ أَمَامَهُ! سَاعَ سَرِيعِ نَجَا، وَطَالِبِ بَطِيءِ رَجَا، وَمُقَصِّرِ فِي النَّارِ هَوَى. الْيَمِينُ وَالشِّمَالُ مَضَلَّةٌ،
وَالطَّرِيقُ الْوَسْطَى هِيَ الْجَادَّةُ عَلَيْهَا بَاقِي الْكِتَابِ وَأَثَارُ النُّبُوَّةِ، وَمِنْهَا مَنْفَعُ السُّنَّةِ، وَإِلَيْهَا مَصِيرُ الْعَاقِبَةِ

He who claims (otherwise) is ruined and he who concocts falsehood is disappointed. He who opposes 1 right with his face gets destruction. It is enough ignorance for a man not to know himself. He who is strong rooted 2 in piety does not get destruction, and the plantation of a people based on piety never remains without water. Hide yourselves in your houses and reform yourselves. Repentance is at your back. One should praise only Allah and condemn only his own self.

هَلَكَ مَنْ ادَّعَى، وَخَابَ مَنْ افْتَرَى، مَنْ أَبْدَى صَفْحَتَهُ لِلْحَقِّ هَلَكَ، وَكَفَى بِالْمَرْءِ جَهْلًا أَلَّا يَعْرِفَ قَدْرَهُ، لَا يَهْلِكُ عَلَى
التَّقْوَى سِنَخَ أُصْلٍ، وَلَا يَظْمَأُ عَلَيْهَا زَرْعُ قَوْمٍ.

فَاسْتَتِرُوا بِبُيُوتِكُمْ، وَأَصْلِحُوا ذَاتَ بَيْنِكُمْ، وَالتَّوْبَةُ مِنْ رَائِكُمْ، وَلَا يَحْمَدُ حَامِدٌ إِلَّا رَبَّهُ، وَلَا يَلْمُ لَائِمٌ إِلَّا نَفْسَهُ.

Alternative Sources for Sermon 16

- (1) Al-Jahiz, *al-Bayan*, I, 170;
- (2) Ibn al-'Athir, *al-Nihayah*, I, 132;
- (3) al-Mufid, *al-'Irshad*, 139;
- (4) Ibn Qutaybah, *'Uyun*, II, 236;
- (5) Ibn 'Abd Rabbih, *al-'Iqd*, II, 162;
- (6) al-'Askari, *al-'Awa'il*, 102;
- (7) al-Kulayni, *Usul al-Kafi*, I, 369 and *Rawdat al-Kafi*, 67;
- (8) al-Tusi, *al'Amali*, * 147.

1. In some versions after the words "man abda safhatahu lilhaqqi halaka:" the words "inda jahalati'n-nas" also occur. In that case the meaning of this sentence would be that he who stands in face of right dies in the estimation of the ignorant.

2. Piety is the name of heart and mind being affected and impressed by the Divine Greatness and Glory, as an effect of which the spirit of man becomes full of fear of Allah, and its inevitable result is that engrossment in worship and prayer increases. It is impossible that heart may be full of Divine fear and there be no manifestation of it in actions and deeds. And since worship and submission reform the heart and nurture the spirit, purity of heart increases with the increase of worship.

That is why in the Qur'an "taqwa" (piety) has been applied sometimes to fear, sometimes to worship and devotion and sometimes to purity of heart and spirit. Thus in the verse "wa iyyaya fattaqun" (and Me you fear [16:2]) taqwa implies fear, in the verse, "ittaqu'l-laha haqqa tuqatihi" (worship Allah as He ought to be worshipped [3:102]), taqwa implies worship and devotion and in the verse "wa yakhsha'l-laha wa yattaqhi faulaika humu'l-faizun" (24:52) taqwa implies purity of spirit and cleanliness of heart.

In the traditions taqwa has been assigned three degrees. The first degree is that a man should follow the injunctions and keep aloof from prohibitions. The second degree is that recommended matters should also be followed and disliked things should be avoided. The third degree is that for fear of falling into doubts one may abstain from the permissible as well. The first degree is for the common men, the second for the nobles and the third for high dignitaries. Allah has referred to these three degrees in the following verse: On those who believe and do good, is no blame for what they ate, (before) when they did guard themselves and did believe, and did good, still (furthermore) they guard themselves and do good; and Allah loveth the doers of good. (Qur'an, 5:93)

Amir al-mu'minin says that only action based on piety is lasting, and only that action will blossom and bear fruit which is watered by piety because worship is only that wherein the feeling of submission exists. Thus, Allah says: Is he therefore better who hath laid his foundation on fear of Allah and (His) goodwill or he who layeth his foundation on the brink of a crumbling hollowed bank so it crumbled down with him into the fire of Hell... (Qur'an, 9:109) Consequently, every such belief as is not based on knowledge and conviction is like the edifice, erected without foundation, wherein there is no stability or firmness while every action that is without piety is like the plantation which withers for lack of watering.

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