

Sermon 28: Surely, the world has turned its back

...

About the transient nature of this world and importance of the next world

This is a section of the Sermon (45) that begins: 'All praise belongs to Allah from Whose mercy no one loses hope...'. It contains 11 exhortations

(ومن خطبة له (عليه السلام

[وهو فصل من الخطبة التي أولها: «الحمد لله غير مقنوط من رحمته» وفيه أحد عشر تنبيها]

Surely this world has turned its back and announced its departure while the next world has appeared forward and proclaimed its approach. Today is the day of preparation while tomorrow is the day of race. The place to proceed to is Paradise while the place of doom is Hell. Is there no one to offer repentance over his faults before his death? Or is there no one to perform virtuous acts before the day of trial?

امَّا بَعْدُ، فَإِنَّ الدُّنْيَا قَدْ أَدْبَرَتْ، وَأَذْنَتْ بِوَدَاعٍ، وَإِنَّ الْآخِرَةَ قَدْ أَقْبَلَتْ، وَأَشْرَفَتْ بِاطِّلَاعٍ أَلَا وَإِنَّ الْيَوْمَ الْمِضْمَارَ وَغَدًا السَّبَاقَ، وَالسَّبَقَةَ الْجَنَّةُ، وَالْغَايَةَ النَّارُ؛ أَفَلَا تَأْتِبُ مِنْ خَطِيئَتِهِ قَبْلَ مَنِيَّتِهِ أَلَا عَامِلٌ لِنَفْسِهِ قَبْلَ يَوْمِ بُؤْسِهِ

Beware, surely you are in the days of hopes behind which stands death. Whoever acts during the days of his hope before approach of his death, his action would benefit him and his death would not harm him. But he who fails to act during the period of hope before the approach of death his action is a loss and his death is a harm to him.

Beware, and act during a period of attraction just as you act during a period of dread. Beware, surely I have not seen a coveter for Paradise asleep nor a dreader from Hell to be asleep. Beware, he whom

right does not benefit must suffer the harm of the wrong, and he whom guidance does not keep firm will be led away by misguidance towards destruction.

أَلَا وَإِنَّكُمْ فِي أَيَّامٍ أَمَلٍ مِنْ وَرَائِهِ أَجَلٌ، فَمَنْ عَمِلَ فِي أَيَّامٍ أَمَلِهِ قَبْلَ حُضُورِ أَجَلِهِ فَقَدْ نَفَعَهُ عَمَلُهُ، وَلَمْ يَضُرَّهُ أَجَلُهُ؛ وَمَنْ قَصَرَ فِي أَيَّامٍ أَمَلِهِ قَبْلَ حُضُورِ أَجَلِهِ، فَقَدْ خَسِرَ عَمَلُهُ، وَضُرَّهُ أَجَلُهُ. أَلَا فاعْمَلُوا فِي الرِّغْبَةِ كَمَا تَعْمَلُونَ فِي الرَّهْبَةِ أَلَا وَإِنِّي لَمْ أَرَ كَالْجَنَّةِ نَامَ طَالِبُهَا، وَلَا كَالنَّارِ نَامَ هَارِبُهَا، أَلَا وَإِنَّهُ مَنْ لَا يَنْفَعُهُ الْحَقُّ يَضُرُّهُ الْبَاطِلُ، وَمَنْ لَا يَسْتَقِم بِهِ الْهُدَى يَجُرُّ بِهِ الضَّلَالُ إِلَى الرَّدَى

Beware, you have been ordered insistently to march and been guided how to provide for the journey. Surely the most frightening thing which I am afraid of about you is to follow desires and to widen the hopes. Provide for yourself from this world what would save you tomorrow (on the Day of Judgement).

أَلَا وَإِنَّكُمْ قَدْ أُمِرْتُمْ بِالظَّعْنِ وَدُلِّلْتُمْ عَلَى الزَّادِ. وَإِنَّ أَخَوْفَ مَا أَخَافُ عَلَيْكُمْ: اتِّبَاعُ الْهَوَى، وَطُولُ الْأَمَلِ. تَزَوَّدُوا فِي الدُّنْيَا مِنَ الدُّنْيَا مَا تَحُوزُونَ بِهِ أَنْفُسَكُمْ غَدًا

As-Sayyid ar-Radi says: If there could be an utterance which would drag by neck towards renunciation in this world and force to action for the next world, it is this sermon. It is enough to cut off from the entanglements of hopes and to ignite the flames of preaching (for virtue) and warning (against vice).

His most wonderful words in this sermon are “Today is the day of preparation while tomorrow is the day of race. The place to proceed to is Paradise while the place of doom is Hell,” because besides sublimity of words, greatness of meaning, true similes and factual illustrations, there are wonderful secrets and delicate implications therein.

قال السيد الشريف رضي الله عنه - وأقول: إنه لو كان كلامٌ يأخذ بالأعناق إلى الزهد في الدنيا، ويضطر إلى عمل الآخرة لكان هذا الكلام، وكفى به قاطعاً لعلائق الآمال، وقادحاً زناد الاعتاط والازدجار.

ومن أعجبه قوله عليه السلام: أَلَا وَإِنَّ الْيَوْمَ الْمِضْمَارَ وَغَدَا السِّبَاقَ، وَالسَّبْقَةُ الْجَنَّةُ وَالْغَايَةُ النَّارُ فَإِنْ فِيهِ - مع فخامة اللفظ، وعظم قدر المعنى، وصادق التمثيل، وواقع التشبيه - سرّاً عجباً، ومعنى لطيفاً

It is his saying that he place to proceed to is Paradise while the place of doom is Hell. Here he has used two different words to convey two different meanings. For Paradise he has used the word “the place to proceed to” but for Hell this word has not been used. One proceeds to a place which he likes and desires, and this can be true for Paradise only.

Hell does not have the attractiveness that it may be liked or proceeded to. We seek Allah’s protection from it. Since for Hell it was not proper to say “to be proceeded to” Amir al-mu’minin employed the word

“doom” implying the last place of stay where one reaches even though it may mean grief and worry or happiness and pleasure.

وهو قوله عليه السلام: والسَّبَقَةُ الجَنَّةُ، وَالْغَايَةُ النَّارُ، فخالف بين اللفظين لاختلاف المعنيين، ولم يقل: «السَّبَقَةُ النَّارُ» كما قال: السَّبَقَةُ الجَنَّةُ، لأن الاستباق إنما يكون إلى أمر محبوب، وغرض مطلوب، وهذه صفة الجنة، وليس هذا المعنى موجوداً في النار، نعوذ بالله منها! فلم يجز أن يقول: «والسَّبَقَةُ النَّارُ»، بل قال: وَالْغَايَةُ النَّارُ، لأن الغاية، قد ينتهي إليها من لا يسره الانتهاء إليها ومن يسره ذلك،

This word is capable of conveying both senses. However, it should be taken in the sense of “*al-masir*” or “*al-ma’al*”, that is, last resort. The Qur’anic verse is

‘Say thou: “Enjoy ye (your pleasures yet a while), for your last resort is unto the (hell) fire”’ (14:30).

Here to say “*sabqatakum*” that is, “the place for you to proceed to” in place of the word “*masirakum*” that is, your doom or last resort would not be proper in any way. Think and ponder over it and see how wondrous is its inner implication and how far its depth goes with beauty. Amir al-mu’minin’s utterance is generally on these lines. In some versions the word “*sabqah*” is shown as “*subqah*” which is applied to reward fixed for the winner in a race. However, both the meanings are near each other, because a reward is not for an undesirable action but for good and commendable performance.

فصلح أن يعبر بها عن الامرين معاً، فهي في هذا الموضع كالمصير والمآل، قال الله عزّوجلّ: (قُلْ تَمَتَّعُوا فَإِنَّ مَصِيرَكُمْ إِلَى النَّارِ)، ولا يجوز في هذا الموضع أن يقال: سَبَقْتُمْ إِلَى النَّارِ، فتأمل ذلك، فباطنه عجيب، وغوره بعيد، وكذلك أكثر كلامه (عليه السلام). وفي رواية أخرى: «والسُّبُقَةُ» بضم السين، والسُّبُقَةُ اسم عندهم لما يجعل للسابق إذا سبق من مال أو عَرَضَ، والمعنيان متقاربان، لأن ذلك لا يكون جزاءً على فعل الامر المذموم، وإنما يكون جزاءً على فعل الامر المحمود.

Alternative Sources for Sermon 28

- (1) Al-Mufid, *al-Irshad*, * 138;
- (2) al-Jahiz, *al-Bayan*, I, 171;
- (3) al-Baqillani, *I’jaz*, 222;
- (4) al-Harrani, *Tuhaf*, 35;
- (5) Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih, *al-’Iqd*, II, 365;
- (6) Ibn Qutaybah, *‘Uyun*, II, 235;

(7) al-Mas'udi, *Muruj*, II, 413;

(8) al-Thaqafi, *al-Gharat*, II, 633.

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