

Sermon 25: Nothing (is left to me) but Kufah...

When Amir al-mu'minin received successive news that Mu'awiyah's men were occupying cities¹ and his own officers in Yemen namely `Ubaydullah ibn `Abbas and Sa'id ibn Nimran came to him retreating after being overpowered by Busr ibn Abi Artah, he was much disturbed by the slackness of his own men in jihad and their difference with his opinion. Proceeding on to the pulpit he said:

ومن خطبة له (عليه السلام)

وقد تواترت عليه الأخبار باستيلاء أصحاب معاوية على البلاد، وقدم عليه عاملاه على اليمن - وهما عبيدالله بن العباس وسعيد بن نمران - لما غلب عليها بسُرُّ بن أبي أرطاة، فقام (عليه السلام) إلى المنبر ضجراً بتناقل أصحابه عن الجهاد، ومخالفتهم له في الرأي، وقال:

Nothing (is left to me) but Kufah which I can hold and extend (which is in my hand to play with). (O Kufah) if this is your condition that whirlwinds continue blowing through you, then Allah may destroy you.

مَا هِيَ إِلَّا الْكُوفَةُ، أَقْبِضُهَا وَأَبْسُطُهَا، إِنْ لَمْ تَكُونِي إِلَّا أَنْتِ، تَهْبُ أَعَاصِيرُكَ،
فَقَبَّحَكَ اللَّهُ!

Then he illustrated with the verse of a poet:

وتمثل بقول الشاعر:

O `Amr! By your good father's life. I have received only a small bit of fat from this pot (fat that remains sticking to it after it has been emptied).

لَعَمْرُ أَبِيكَ الْخَيْرِ يَا عَمْرُوإِنِّي عَلَى وَضْرٍ - مِنْ ذَا الْأَنْاءِ - قَلِيلِ

Then he continued:

I have been informed that Busr has overpowered Yemen. By Allah, I have begun thinking about these people that they would shortly snatch away the whole country through their unity on their wrong and your disunity (from your own right), and separation, your disobedience of your Imam in matters of right and their obedience to their leader in matters of wrong, their fulfilment of the trust in favour of their master and your betrayal, their good work in their cities and your mischief. Even if I give you charge of a wooden bowl I fear you would run away with its handle.

ثم قال (عليه السلام): أُنبئتُ بَسْرًا قَدْ اطَّلَعَ الْيَمَنَ، وَإِنِّي وَاللَّهِ لَأَظُنُّ هُوَلاءِ الْقَوْمِ
سَيِّدَالْوَنَ مِنْكُمْ بِاجْتِمَاعِهِمْ عَلَى بَاطِلِهِمْ، وَتَفَرُّقِكُمْ عَنْ حَقِّكُمْ، وَبِمَعْصِيَتِكُمْ
إِمَامَكُمْ فِي الْحَقِّ، وَطَاعَتِهِمْ إِمَامَهُمْ فِي الْبَاطِلِ، وَبِأَدَائِهِمْ الْأَمَانَةَ إِلَى صَاحِبِهِمْ
وَخِيَانَتِكُمْ، وَبِصَلَاحِهِمْ فِي بِلَادِهِمْ وَفَسَادِكُمْ، فَلَوْ أُنْتَمَنْتُ أَحَدَكُمْ عَلَى قَعْبِ
لَخَشِيتُ أَنْ يَذْهَبَ بِعِلَاقَتِهِ.

O My God they are disgusted of me and I am disgusted of them. They are weary of me and I am weary of them. Change them for me with better ones and change me for them with worse one. O My God, melt their hearts as salt melts in water. By Allah, I wish I had only a thousand horsemen of Banu Firas ibn Ghanm (as the poet says):

If you call them the horsemen would come to you like the summer cloud.

(Thereafter Amir al-mu'minin alighted from the pulpit).

اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي قَدْ مَلَلْتُهُمْ وَمَلُونِي، وَسَأَمْتُهُمْ وَسَأَمُونِي، فَأَبْدِلْنِي بِهِمْ خَيْرًا مِنْهُمْ،
وَأَبْدِلْهُمْ بِي شَرًّا مِنِّي، اللَّهُمَّ مِثْ قُلُوبِهِمْ كَمَا يُمَاتُ الْمِلْحُ فِي الْمَاءِ، أَمَا وَاللَّهِ

لَوَدِدْتُ أَنْ لِي بِكُمْ أَلْفَ فَارِسٍ مِنْ بَنِي فِرَاسٍ بِنِ غَنَمٍ:

هُنَالِكَ، لَوْ دَعَوْتُ، أَتَاكَ مِنْهُمْ فَوَارِسٌ مِثْلُ أَرْمِيَةِ الْحَمِيمِ

ثم نزل (عليه السلام) من المنبر.

as-Sayyid ar-Radi says: In this verse the word "armiyah" is plural of "ramiyy" which means cloud and "hamim" here means summer. The poet has particularised the cloud of summer because it moves swiftly. This is because it is devoid of water while a cloud moves slowly when it is laden with rain. Such clouds generally appear (in Arabia) in winter. By this verse the poet intends to convey that when they are called and referred to for help they approach with rapidity and this is borne by the first line "if you call them they will reach you."

قال السيد الشريف: قلتُ أنا: والارمية جمع رمي وهو: السحاب، والحميم في هذا الموضع: وقت الصيف، وإنما خص الشاعر سحاب الصيف بالذكر لأنه أشد جفولاً، وأسرع خُفوفاً، لأنه لا ماء فيه، وإنما يكون السحاب ثقيل السير لامتلأته بالماء، وذلك لا يكون في الاكثر إلا زمان الشتاء، وإنما أراد الشاعر وصفهم بالسرعة إذا دُعوا، والابغاث إذا استغيثوا، والدليل على ذلك قوله: «هنالك، لو دعوت، أتاك منهم...».

Alternative Sources for Sermon 25

- (1) Al-Mas`udi, *Muruj*, III, 149;
- (2) Ibn `Abd Rabbih, *al-`Iqd*, III, 337;
- (3) Ibn `Asakir, *Ta'rikh*, I, 305, X, 225;
- (4) al-Baladhuri, *Ansab*, II, 383;
- (5) al-Mufid, *al-`Irshad*,* 163;

(6) al-Thaqafi, *al-Gharat* II, 636.

1. When after arbitration Mu`awiyah's position was stabilised he began thinking of taking possession of Amir al-mu'minin's cities and extend his domain. He sent his armies to different areas in order that they might secure allegiance for Mu`awiyah by force. In this connection he sent Busr ibn Abi Artat to Hijaz and he shed blood of thousands of innocent persons from Hijaz upto Yemen, burnt alive tribes after tribes in fire and killed even children, so much so that he butchered two young boys of `Ubaydullah ibn `Abbas the Governor of Yemen before their mother Juwayriyah bint Khalid ibn Qaraz al-Kinaniyyah.

When Amir al-mu'minin came to know of his slaughtering and bloodshed he thought of sending a contingent to crush him but due to continuous fighting people had become weary and showed heartlessness instead of zeal. When Amir al-mu'minin observed their shirking from war he delivered this sermon wherein he roused them to enthusiasm and self respect, and prompted them to jihad by describing before them the enemy's wrongfulness and their own short-comings. At last Jariyah ibn Qudamah as-Sa`di responded to his call and taking an army of two thousand set off in pursuit of Busr and chased him out of Amir al-mu'minin's domain.

Source URL:

<https://www.al-islam.org/nahjul-balagha-part-1-sermons/sermon-25-nothing-left-me-kufah>