

Sermon 164: The people are behind me...

When people went to Amir al-mu'minin in a deputation and complained to him through what they had to say against `Uthman, and requested him to speak to him on their behalf and to admonish him for their sake, he went to see him and said: 1

ومن كلام له (عليه السلام)

لما اجتمع الناس اليه وشكوا ما نقموه على عثمان وسألوه مخاطبته واستعبابه لهم، فدخل (عليه السلام) على عثمان فقال:

The people are behind me and they have made me an ambassador between you and themselves; but by Allah, I do not know what to say to you. I know nothing (in this matter) which you do not know, nor can I lead you to any matter of which you are not aware. You certainly know what we know, we have not come to know anything before you which we could tell you; nor did we learn anything in secret which we should convey to you. You have seen as we have seen and you have heard as we have heard. You sat in the company of the Prophet of Allah as we did. (Abu Bakr) Ibn Abi Quhafah and (`Umar) ibn al-Khattab were no more responsible for acting righteously than you, since you are nearer than both of them to the Prophet of Allah through kinship, and you also hold relationship to him by marriage which they do not hold.

إِنَّ النَّاسَ وَرَائِي، وَقَدْ اسْتَسْفَرُونِي بَيْنَكَ وَبَيْنَهُمْ، وَوَاللَّهِ مَا أُدْرِي مَا أَقُولُ لَكَ! مَا
أَعْرَفُ شَيْئًا تَجْهَلُهُ، وَلَا أَدُلُّكَ عَلَى أَمْرٍ لَا تَعْرِفُهُ، إِنَّكَ لَتَعْلَمُ مَا نَعْلَمُ، مَا سَبَقْنَاكَ
إِلَى شَيْءٍ فَخُبِّرَكَ عَنْهُ، وَلَا خَلَوْنَا بِشَيْءٍ فَنُبَلِّغُكَهُ، وَقَدْ رَأَيْتَ كَمَا رَأَيْنَا، وَسَمِعْتَ

كَمَا سَمِعْنَا، وَصَحِبْتَ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ (صلى الله عليه وآله) كَمَا صَحِبْنَا. وَمَا ابْنُ أَبِي قُحَافَةَ وَلَا ابْنُ الْخَطَّابِ بِأَوْلَى بِعَمَلِ الْحَقِّ مِنْكَ، وَأَنْتَ أَقْرَبُ إِلَى رَسُولِ اللَّهِ (صلى الله عليه وآله) وَشَيْجَةَ رَحِمَ مِنْهُمَا، وَقَدْ نَلْتِ مَنْ صَهْرِهِ مَا لَمْ يَنَالَا.

Then (fear) Allah, in your own self; for, by Allah, you are not being shown anything as if you are blind or being apprised of anything as if you are ignorant. The ways are clear while the banners of faith are fixed. You should know that among the creatures of Allah, the most distinguished person before Allah is the just Imam who has been guided (by Allah) and guides others. So, he stands by the recognised ways of the Prophet's behaviour and destroys unrecognised innovations.

The (Prophet's) ways are clear and they have signs, while innovations are also clear and they too have signs. Certainly, the worst man before Allah is the oppressive Imam who has gone astray and through whom others go astray. He destroys the the accepted *sunnah* and revives abandoned innovations. I heard the Messenger of Allah saying: "On the Day of Judgement the oppressive Imam will be brought without anyone to support him or anyone to advance excuses on his behalf, and then he will be thrown into Hell where he will rotate as the hand-mill rotates, then (eventually) he will be confined to its hollow."

فَاللَّهِ اللَّهُ فِي نَفْسِكَ! فَإِنَّكَ - وَاللَّهِ - مَا تُبْصِرُ مِنْ عَمِيٍّ، وَلَا تُعْلَمُ مِنْ جَهْلٍ، وَإِنَّ الطُّرُقَ لَوَاضِحَةً، وَإِنَّ أَعْلَامَ الدِّينِ لِقَائِمَةٌ. فَاعْلَمْ أَنَّ أَفْضَلَ عِبَادِ اللَّهِ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ إِمَامٌ عَادِلٌ، هُدًى وَهَدًى، فَأَقَامَ سُنَّةَ مَعْلُومَةٍ، وَأَمَاتَ بَدْعَةَ مَجْهُولَةٍ، وَإِنَّ السُّنَنَ لِنَيْرَةٍ، لَهَا أَعْلَامٌ، وَإِنَّ الْبَدْعَ لظَاهِرَةٌ، لَهَا أَعْلَامٌ، وَإِنَّ شَرَّ النَّاسِ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ إِمَامٌ جَائِرٌ ضَلَّ وَضَلَّ بِهِ، فَأَمَاتَ سُنَّةَ مَأْخُودَةٍ، وَأَحْيَا بَدْعَةَ مَتْرُوكَةٍ. وَإِنِّي سَمِعْتُ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ (صلى الله عليه وآله) يَقُولُ: "يُوتَى يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ بِالْأَمَامِ الْجَائِرِ وَلَيْسَ مَعَهُ نَصِيرٌ وَلَا عَازِرٌ، فَيُلْقَى فِي نَارِ جَهَنَّمَ، فَيَدُورُ فِيهَا كَمَا تَدُورُ الرَّحَى، ثُمَّ يَرْتَبِطُ فِي قَعْرِهَا."

I swear to you by Allah that you should not be that Imam of the people who will be killed because it has been said that, "An Imam of this people will be killed after which killing and fighting will be made open for them till the Day of Judgement, and he will confuse their matters and spread troubles over them. As a result, they will not discern truth from wrong. They will oscillate like waves and would be utterly misled." You should not behave as the carrying beast for Marwan so that he may drag you wherever he likes, despite (your) seniority of age and length of life.

وَإِنِّي أَنشُدُكَ اللَّهَ أَنْ تَكُونَ إِمَامَ هَذِهِ الْأُمَّةِ الْمَقْتُولِ، فَإِنَّهُ كَانَ يُقَالُ: يُقْتَلُ فِي هَذِهِ
 الْأُمَّةِ إِمَامٌ يَفْتَحُ عَلَيْهَا الْقَتْلَ وَالْقِتَالَ إِلَى يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ، وَيَلْبَسُ أُمُورَهَا عَلَيْهَا، وَيَبِثُّ
 الْفِتْنَ فِيهَا، فَلَا يُبْصِرُونَ الْحَقَّ مِنَ الْبَاطِلِ، يَمُوجُونَ فِيهَا مَوْجًا، وَيَمْرُجُونَ فِيهَا
 مَرَجًا. فَلَا تَكُونَنَّ لِمَرْوَانَ سَيِّقَةً يَسُوقُكَ حَيْثُ شَاءَ بَعْدَ جَلَالِ السِّنِّ وَتَقْضِي
 الْعُمُرَ.

Then `Uthman said to Amir al-mu'minin: "Speak to the people to give me time until I redress their grievances." Amir al-mu'minin then said: "So far as Medina is concerned here is no question of time. As for remoter areas you can have the time needed for your order to reach there."

فَقَالَ لَهُ عُثْمَانُ: كَلِّمِ النَّاسَ فِي أَنْ يُوجِّلُونِي، حَتَّى أَخْرَجَ إِلَيْهِمْ مِنْ مَظَالِمِهِمْ،
 فَقَالَ (عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ): مَا كَانَ بِالْمَدِينَةِ فَلَا أَجَلَ فِيهِ، وَمَا غَابَ فَأَجَلُهُ وَصَوْلُ أَمْرِكَ
 إِلَيْهِ.

Alternative Sources for Sermon 164

- (1) Al-Baladhuri, *Ansab*, V, 60;
- (2) al-Tabari, *Ta'rikh*, V, 96, events of 34 H.;
- (3) Ibn `Abd Rabbih, *al-`Iqd*, IV, 308, II, 273;
- (4) al-Mufid, *al-Jamal*, 100;
- (5) Ibn Miskawayh, *Tajarib al-'umam* (1909), I, 478.

1. During the Caliphate of `Uthman when the Muslims were weary of the oppression of the Government and its officials collected in Medina to complain to the senior companions of the Prophet, they came to Amir al-mu'minin in a peaceful manner and requested him to see `Uthman and advise him not to trample on the Muslims' rights and to put an end to the troubles which were proving the cause of the people's ruin, whereupon Amir al-mu'minin went to him and uttered these words.

In order to make the bitterness of the admonition palatable Amir al-mu'minin adopted that way of speech in the beginning which would create a sense of responsibility in the addressee and direct him towards his obligations. Thus, by mentioning his companionship of the Prophet, his personal position, and his kinship to the Prophet as against the two previous Caliphs, his intention was to make him realise his duties; in any case, this was obviously not an occasion for eulogising him, so that its later portion can be disregarded and the whole speech be regarded as an eulogy of his attainments, because from its very beginning it is evident that whatever `Uthman did, he did it wilfully, that nothing was done without his knowledge or his

being informed, and that he could not be held unaccountable for it because of his being unaware of it. If the adoption of a line of action which made the whole Islamic world raise hue and cry in spite of his having being a companion of the Prophet, having heard his instructions, having seen his behaviour and having been acquainted with the commandments of Islam can be regarded as a distinction, then this taunt may also be regarded as praise. If that is not a distinction then this too cannot be called an eulogy. In fact, the words about which it is argued that they are in praise are enough to prove the seriousness of his crime, because a crime in ignorance and unawareness is not so serious as the weight given to the seriousness of the commission of a crime despite knowledge and awareness. Consequently a person who is unaware of the rise and fall of a road and stumbles in the dark night is excusable but a person who is aware of the rise and fall of the road and stumbled in broad day light is liable to be blamed. If on this occasion he is told that he has eyes and is also aware of the rise and fall of the way, it would not mean that his vastness of knowledge or the brightness of his eye-sight is being praised, but the intention would be that he did not notice the pitfalls despite his eyes, and did not walk properly, and that therefore for him, having or not having eyes is the same, and knowing or not knowing is equal.

In this connection great stress is laid on his being a son-in-law, namely that the Prophet married his two daughters Ruqayyah and Umm Kulthum to him one after the other. Before taking this to be a distinction, the real nature of `Uthman's son-in-lawship should be seen. History shows that in this matter `Uthman did not enjoy the distinction of being the first, but before him Ruqayyah and Umm Kulthum had been married to two sons of Abu Lahab namely `Utbah and `Utaybah, but despite their being sons-in-law, they have not been included among people of position of pre-prophethood period. How then can this be regarded as a source of position without any personal merit, when there is no authority about the importance of this relationship, nor was any importance attached to this matter in such a way that there might have been some competition between `Uthman and some other important personality in this regard and that his selection for it might have given him prominence, or that these two girls might have been shown to possess an important position in history, tradition or biography as a result of which this relationship could be given special importance and regarded as a distinction for him? If the marriage of these two daughters with `Utbah and `Utaybah in the pre-prophethood period is held as lawful on the ground that marriage with unbelievers had not till then been made unlawful, then in `Uthman's case also the condition for lawfulness was his acceptance of Islam, there is no doubt that he had pronounced the kalimah ash-shahadatayn (there is no god but Allah and Muhammad is His Messenger) and had accepted Islam outwardly. As such this marriage can be held a proof of his outward Islam, but no other honour can be proved through it. Again, it is also not agreed that these two were the real daughters of the Messenger of Allah, because there is one group which denies them to be his real daughters, and regards them as being the daughters of Khadijah's sister Halah, or the daughters of her own previous husband. Thus, Abu'l-Qasim al-Kufi (d. 352 A.H.) writes:

"When the Messenger of Allah married Khadijah, then some time thereafter Halah died leaving two daughters, one named Zaynab and the other named Ruqayyah and both of them were brought up by the Prophet and Khadijah and they maintained them, and it was the custom before Islam that a child was assigned to whoever brought him up." (al-Istighathah, p. 69)

Ibn Hisham has written about the issues of Hadrat Khadijah as follows:

"Before marriage with the Prophet she was married to Abi Halah ibn Malik. She delivered for him Hind ibn Abi Halah and Zaynab bint Abi Halah. Before marriage with Abi Halah she was married to `Utayyiq ibn `Abid ibn `Abdillah ibn `Amr ibn Makhzum and she delivered for him `Abdullah and a daughter." (as-Sirah an-nabawiyah, vol. 4, p. 293)

This shows that of Hadrat Khadijah had two daughters before being married to the Prophet and according to all appearance they would be called his daughters and those to whom they were married would be called his sons-in-law, but the position of this relationship would be the same as if those girls were his daughters. Therefore, before putting it forth as a matter for pride the real status of the daughters should be noted and a glance should be cast at `Uthman's conduct. In this connection, al-Bukhari and other narrators (of traditions) and historians record this tradition as follows:

Anas ibn Malik relates that: "We were present on the occasion of the burial of the Prophet's daughter Umm Kulthum, while the Prophet was sitting beside her grave. I saw his eyes shedding tears. Then he said, 'Is there any one among you who has not committed a sin last night?' Abu Talhah (Zayd ibn Sahl al-Ansari) said, 'I', then the Prophet said, 'Then you get into the grave,' consequently he got down into the grave."

The commentators said about 'committed sin' that the Holy Prophet meant to say 'one who had not had sexual intercourse.'

On this occasion the Holy Prophet unveiled the private life of `Uthman and prevented him from getting down into the grave, although it was a prominent merit of the Prophet's character that he did not disgrace or belittle any one by making public his private life, and despite of knowledge of others' shortcomings, ignored them; but in this case the filth was such that it was deemed necessary to disgrace him before the whole crowd.

Since `Uthman did not show any regard for the demise of his wife (Umm Kulthum) nor was he moved or felt sorry (for this event), and paid no heed to the cutting off his relationship with the Holy Prophet (for being his son-in-law), he (`Uthman) had sexual intercourse on the same night, therefore the Holy Prophet deprived him of this right and honour. (al-Bukhari, as-Sahih, vol. 2, pp. 100-101, 114; Ahmad ibn Hanbal, al-Musnad, vol. 3, pp. 126, 228, 229, 270; al-Hakim, al-Mustadrak, vol. 4, p. 47; al-Bayhaqi, as-Sunan al-kubra, vol. 4, p. 53; Ibn Sa`d, at-Tabaqat al-kabir, vol. 8, p. 26; as-Suhayli, ar-Rawd al-unuf, vol. 2, p. 107; Ibn Hajar, al-Isabah, vol. 4, p. 489; Fath al-bari, vol. 3, p. 122; al-`Ayni, `Umdah al-qari, vol. 4, p. 85; Ibn al-Athir, an-Nihayah, vol. 3, p. 276; Ibn Manzur, Lisan al-`Arab, vol. 9, pp. 280-281; az-Zabidi, Taj al-`arus, vol. 6, p. 220).

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