

Sermon 208: O people, matters between me and you....

When Amir al-mu'minin's companions expressed displeasure about his attitude concerning Arbitration, 1 he said:

ومن كلام له (عليه السلام)

قاله لما اضطرب عليه أصحابه في أمر الحكومة

O people, matters between me and you went as I wished till war exhausted you. By Allah, it has overtaken some of you and left others, and has completely weakened your enemy. Till yesterday I was giving orders but today I am being given orders, and till yesterday I was dissuading people (from wrong acts) but today I am being dissuaded. You have now shown liking to live in this world, and it is not for me to bring you to what you dislike.

أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ، إِنَّهُ لَمْ يَزَلْ أَمْرِي مَعَكُمْ عَلَى مَا أُحِبُّ، حَتَّى نَهَكْتُمْ الْحَرْبُ، وَقَدْ
وَاللَّهِ أَخَذْتُ مِنْكُمْ وَتَرَكْتُ، وَهِيَ لِعَدُوِّكُمْ أَنَّهُكَ. لَقَدْ كُنْتُ أَمْسَ أَمِيرًا، فَأَصْبَحْتُ
الْيَوْمَ مَأْمُورًا! وَكُنْتُ أَمْسَ نَاهِيًا، فَأَصْبَحْتُ الْيَوْمَ مَنْهِيًا! وَقَدْ أَحْبَبْتُمُ الْبَقَاءَ،
وَلَيْسَ لِي أَنْ أَحْمِلَكُمْ عَلَى مَا تَكْرَهُونَ!

Alternative Sources for Sermon 208

(1) Nasr, *Siffin*, 484;

(2) Ibn Qutaybah, *al-Imamah*, I, 118;

(3) al-Mas`udi, *Muruj*, II, 400.

1. When the surviving forces of the Syrians lost ground and were ready to run away from the field Mu`awiyah changed the whole phase of the battle by using the Qur'an as his instrument of strategy, and succeeded in creating such a division among the Iraqis that, despite Amir al-mu'minin's efforts at counselling, they were not prepared to take any forward step, but insisted on stopping the war, whereupon Amir al-mu'minin too had to agree to arbitration. Among these people some had actually been duped and believed that they were being asked to abide by the Qur'an but there were others who had become weary of the long period of war and had lost courage. Then people got a good opportunity to stop the war, and so they cried hoarse for its postponement. There were others who had accompanied Amir al-mu'minin because of his temporal authority but did not support him by heart, nor did they aim at victory for him. There were some people who had expectations with Mu`awiyah, and had started attaching hopes to him for this, while there were some who were, from the very beginning, in league with him. In these circumstances and with this type of the army it was really due to Amir al-mu'minin's political ability and competence of military control and administration that he carried the war up to this stage, and if Mu`awiyah had not adopted this trick there could have been no doubt in Amir al-mu'minin's victory because the military power of the Syrian forces had been exhausted and defeat was hovering over its head. In this connection, Ibn Abi'l-Hadid writes:

Malik al-Ashtar had reached Mu`awiyah and grabbed him by the neck. The entire might of the Syrians had been smashed. Only so much movement was discernible in them as remains in the tail of a lizard which is killed, but the tail continues hopping right and left. (Sharh Nahjul Balaghah, vol. 11, pp.30-31)

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