*The Companions of the Trench (Part I)* ***أصحاب الأخدود*** *Ramadan – Ashton Central Mosque – 13/07/13*

In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful. Peace and blessings of Allah be upon Prophet Muhammad.

So far we have tackled the story of "Qabeel and Habeel. Remember what I told you in the first lectures that each story deals with a certain human problem in which we see ourselves and our defects. Let it be one of your goals to fix your life with the Parables of the Qur'an. Keep our motto in your mind, "I will live by the Qur'an".

**Introduction To The Story**

Today's story is a new one depicting a different aspect. It is displayed in Surat al-Burooj. It is a true story and the Prophet narrated it to Ali Ibn-Abu-Taleb, Bilal, Sohaib, and Somaia. The story is universal and addressed to humanity in large. This is one of the beautiful aspects of the “Parables of the Qur’an”.

**Where And When The Story Happens**

The story took place in Yemen, in a district called Najran now located near the boarders of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. This was in the year 523 A.D; that is only 40 years before the revelation of Islam.

**Characters Of The Story**

The characters of the story are a king, a magician, a priest and a boy of 15 year-old. The boy is the main character of the story and not the priest. His name is Abdullah Ibn-Samer.

**Morals Of The Story**

The Prophet wants to teach us some morals behind this story such as

1- Everyone should have a message in his life. Humans live not just for eating, drinking, marrying, breeding, then die.

2- Live with and for the Truth whatever it takes; face injustice with wisdom not violence.

3- Live for people and do not ever help tyrants.

4- Life is short; so do not ever put yourself down for the sake of money.

5- The media has a crucial role either in misleading or in enlightening people; both sides are in the story.

**The King**

Once upon a time, there was a king called Thu-Nowas living in Yemen. He was a tyrant oppressing his people. Moreover, he imposed himself as a god in order to overlay his tyranny. The king committed two sins; eating up people’s riches and imposing himself as a god. Since the people were afraid of his tyranny, they accepted him as a god and forgot their belief that there is no god to be worshiped but Allah. Only one person did not accept the king as a god, the priest.

**The Priest**

The priest was an aged man; he was the only one who knew that the king was a liar deceiving the people in order to eat up their riches. The priest knew that he had to resolve two problems, the first one is that the belief that there is no god to be worshiped but Allah had been forgotten, and the second is that the riches of the people had been eaten up. This must be done wisely without violence.

The priest began to speak with people about truth, justice, freedom, and that there is no god but Allah. Some of the people trusted the priest. Consequently, this led the king to torment one of the priest’s followers in order to know who was behind this. Out of extreme torture, the man informed the king about the priest. The king internally knew that he was not a god and he was weak; therefore he wanted to do some propaganda to regain people's trust. Hence, he called for a magician to help him in his mission.

**The Magician**

The main role of the magician was to convince people that the king is a god. He started doing some illusions that appear as miracles so that he can mislead people and deceive them. Unfortunately, they believed the magician; hence, the priest eloped outside the country living in a small cave. The king was so happy with the magician and rewarded him generously. After the priest had escaped, the king announced that whoever would find him would be granted a million Dinar. The priest lived outside the country, yet he was seeking the opportunity to find out someone to pass the message on him. On the other hand, the king was suspicious of the magician because he is the only one who knew his secret.

The magician is a symbol changing from an era to another; it can be art, media, or any other attracting means that has the power to direct people's thought. The magician is the means of the king to deceive people and preserve his reign. Years passed, and the magician grew older so he asked the king to look for a smart boy to teach him magic and be in the king’s aid doing whatever he wanted. Indeed the king brought him the boy.

**The Boy**

There was a seven year-old boy attending all this; the Prophet in his narration was calling him "the boy" so that all the youth interact with the story. When the boy became 15 years old, the king brought him to the magician to teach him magic. He was very smart and a genius. He entered the castle of the king and learnt all means of magic and delusion. He did not have a message to live for, and he was fascinated with the luxury of the castle and dreamt of the day when he will replace the old magician.

The boy was of a poor family living outside the country. Whenever he goes to the magician, he was passing by the cave of the priest. See how Allah is conducting incidents according to His commands. While the magician is looking for the new generation to continue delusion, the priest as well is looking for the new generation to pass on the message. The priest began to notice that there is someone passing by him regularly. He was afraid because he knew that the king assigned a million Dinar for the one who would find him. However, he was observing the one passing by him and found that he was a young boy who looked smart. Now the game is on the new generation; which of the two parties will win the game, the magician or the priest? What will be the choice of the new generation be, the Truth or the illusion?

**Meeting The Priest**

The priest wanted to reach the boy and talk to him. One day on his way to the magician, the boy fell in a pit. The priest went to him and told him let the magic you had learnt take you out of the pit. However, the priest gave his hand to the boy and took him out of the pit. Then he told him, "The magician taught you delusion, but I will teach you the Truth. If you want to learn the Truth, this is my cave." The priest took the risk for the sake of the Truth because the boy might inform the king and take the prize. The priest was sure that the boy would come back.

The boy started asking about the priest before accepting to learn from him. The people of the country told him that he was a good man but there were some suspicions around him. At this point, the boy decided to go to the priest to discover the truth himself. Love of discovery is innate in children, and I do advise parents to wisely deal with this instinct. Thus, you must raise your children on values and ethics from the very beginning because at certain age you will lose control on them.

**The Boy Is Taking Knowledge From The Priest**

The boy returned back to the priest and began to ask him about everything, and the priest answered. Actually, the boy was taking knowledge from both the priest and the magician at the same time. The priest taught him that there is no god to be worshiped but Allah, and that the king was not a god. He informed him that all what he was learning from the magician was delusion to mislead people and how the magician sold his religion for money. The boy conceived what he heard from the priest, yet he did not submit to him completely. He continued in his lessons with the magician as well because still he was not quite sure.

Now I am addressing our youth, what is your message in life? Do not ever live for nothing; you should rather live for the Truth. Find out what you can do for your family, community, religion, and do it.

**The Boy Between The Priest And The Magician**

The boy was attending the teachings of both the priest and the magician every day. He found that the priest was living in a cave and the magician in the king's castle. One was teaching him the Truth while the other was teaching him delusion. This was a kind of preparation to the boy. He dealt with two opposites and took knowledge from two contradictory sources, what broadened his thinking.

Notice that the priest never told the boy to stop going to the magician. He respected his mind and consequently the boy trusted him. The priest started teaching the boy many principles such as loving people and helping them. He also taught him that there is no god to be worshiped but Allah and therefore we do not have to fear any other.

**The Boy's Choice**

The priest agreed with the boy to teach him in the morning before going to the magician and in the evening before returning back home. As a result, the boy was always late whenever he went to the magician, and made the magician hit him. The same happened in his return and made his parents hit him as well. The priest never prevented the boy from attending magic lessons, he just directed him to the truth. Parents as well should not prevent their children from anything because we are in an open world, just secure them with values and ethics.

After some time, the mischief incurred from the magician and the parents of the boy surpassed. Therefore, the boy went to the priest complaining and looking for his advice. The priest told him to spend some more time with his parents and with the magician so that when any of them inquires, he would answer that the second party belated him. He is teaching him to be flexible without lying. Moreover, he did not teach him to be ideal. He did not tell him to tell them the truth or to endure their mischief. The priest knew that the boy was in confrontation between truth and untruth, so there must be flexibility.

**The Decisive Day And The Revelation Of The Truth**

The boy became tired of the inner conflict inside him. Still he did not choose which one to follow; however, he tended to the priest. Now he took the experience; still he did not have a message. I would like to address the youth to work hard and make effort in order to gain experience and succeed in life.

One day, the boy was passing in his way then heard some people screaming. There was a lion blocking the road and preventing people from getting water from the well. The people knew that the boy was the student of the magician. All of them were afraid and did not know what to do. The boy got an idea to know who was more beloved to Allah, the magician or the priest. He recognized that if he helped people, Allah will reveal the truth for him. He took a stone from the ground, looked at it and said, "O Allah, if the priest and his teachings are more beloved to You than that of the magician, then kill the lion with this stone". Then he threw the stone into the mouth of the lion and killed him. The people cheered for the boy as a great magician, while he said that verily there is no god to be worshiped but Allah. This was the decisive day in the life of the boy knowing the Truth and that there is no god but Allah.

**O Son You Are Better Than Me**

Afterwards, the boy hurried to the priest and narrated what happened. The priest told him that he was better than him because he helped people and communicated with them unlike himself isolating himself in a cave. He told the boy that he would succeed in his mission because he cared for people and Allah would never leave him because he chose to be with Allah not to be with the king or the magician. Notice how sincere the priest is in telling the boy that he is better than him.

The priest knew that the lion was preventing people from reaching their benefit, exactly like the king. As long as the boy killed the lion and rescued the people, then he would be the one to liberate them from injustice.

**أَحَسِبَ النَّاسُ أَنْ يُتْرَكُوا أَنْ يَقُولُوا آمَنَّا وَهُمْ لا يُفْتَنُونَ**

Does mankind reckon that they will be left to say, “We believe” and will not be tempted?" (29:2).

The priest informed the boy that as long as he chose to reform and call for the truth, then he would go on trials. This was his last message to the boy; if he did not want to be trialled, then he could decline. Remember the Prophet in the beginning of his missionary activity when Waraqa Ibn–Nawfal told him that his people would get him away from home.

**الم (١)أَحَسِبَ النَّاسُ أَنْ يُتْرَكُوا أَنْ يَقُولُوا آمَنَّا وَهُمْ لا يُفْتَنُونَ (٢)وَلَقَدْ فَتَنَّا الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ فَلَيَعْلَمَنَّ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ صَدَقُوا وَلَيَعْلَمَنَّ الْكَاذِبِينَ**

"Alif, Lam, Mîm Does mankind reckon that they will be left to say, “We believe” and will not be tempted? And indeed We already tempted the ones that were even before them, so indeed Allah definitely knows the ones who (act) sincerely, and indeed Allah definitely knows the liars" (29:1-3).

Tomorrow we will know what would happen to the boy after preparing for the mission.