*The Companions of the Trench (Part II)* ***أصحاب الأخدود*** *Ramadan – Ashton Central Mosque – 14/07/13*

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

**The Confrontation**

Today we will continue yesterday’s story. To recap, the story is about a king who had a magician. The magician is a propaganda machine that tries to advocate the worshipping of the king as a religion among his subjects. There are two problems: people are deprived of their rights and property, and they do not realise the true God, due to the King’s tyranny and the magician’s propaganda. The only one man who knew the truth is a priest. The priest is wanted and thus he decides to isolate himself. He gets old and so does the magician. Both are looking for the new generation represented by the 15-year-old young man, the real hero of the story. The climax is whether the young man chooses good or evil. We stopped at this yesterday.

The young man resorts to Allah and chooses to be a priest. Therefore, he is now ready and well-prepared for his battle. He will face the king alone. He will triumph and the word of Allah is spread. In fact, this story may be the reason why Yemen embraced Islam many years later. Prophet Muhammad told the story to Ali when he was a young man. Forty years later, when Ali went to Yemen to advocate Islam, he found them very kind-hearted, perhaps because of that young man.

**The Young Man’s Plan**

The young man analyses the problems: people have forgotten about God, and the king is a tyrant. He thinks that the solution is counter-propaganda that advocates the good and convinces the people that the king is just like any other man.

The question is: who is better, the young man or the priest? The young man of course. He chooses not to isolate himself. He chooses to face the challenge.

The young man starts living among the people. He helps everybody. Mind you he never resorted to violence. The good starts to spread. For instance, he finds that the people are sick. Allah grants him the gift of treating many diseases. This is how it works for anybody who attempts to help others: Allah will help them find in themselves things that they never think they have or can.

Only the magician knows that what the young man is doing is not magic. But he cannot tell. When the king asks the young man why he does not consult the magician anymore, the young man says that he has learnt all the tricks. The king feels content, for this way he can get rid of the old magician. He does not realize that this old magician is all that is left for him. Knowing the king’s intentions, the magician flees.

After the first triumph over the magician, the young man realises that he now needs a plan to confront the king. He searches for somebody to get him close to the king. One of the king’s close entourage is blind. On knowing about the young man, the blind man tries to use the young man by sending him some gifts. Tempted as he is, the young man says that he does not cure anything, only Allah cures people. He proposes that if the blind man bears witness that there is no god but Allah, the young man will pray to Allah to cure the man from blindness. This is how valuable the belief in Allah is. The blind man bears witness that there is no god but Allah and his blindness comes to an end.

The king’s companion goes to the king. Upon seeing him, the king asks how come you are not blind anymore. The companion says Allah has cured me. The king says I have not cured you from anything and asked if he has any other God. The companion says that the king and himself have the same God. The king starts to torture him until he tells him about the young man.

The king summons the young man. The king tells him that he has heard that he has an ability to cure the sick. The young man interrupts and claims to cure nobody and that only Allah cures people. The king asks if he has another God other than himself. The young man answers that the two of them have one God and that there is no god but Allah. The king keeps torturing the young man until he tells about the priest.

The lesson here is that it is not the end of the world to lose or fail once. Although he tells the king about the priest, he will rise again and continue moving.

The king realizes that the young man is the most dangerous of the three believers: the young man, the priest and the king’s companion. This is because the young man is loved by the people. The king will brutally kill the companion and the priest. So he thought he will make the young man so afraid that he goes in public and claim that he is just a magician. But in fact, this brutality makes the young man even stronger.

When asked to repent before their death, the priest and the companion refuse to give up on their God and die at the king’s hands.

**The King’s Failure**

The king wants to take the young man away from the people, whereas the young man wants to send the people a message: the king is weak and Allah is stronger. He orders his soldiers to dress as civilians and take the boy to the mountains and push him from there so that it may seem to the people as an accident. All the way the young man keeps reciting, “There is no god but Allah”. He invokes Allah, "O Allah protect me from their evils, with whatever You desire and in whichever way You desire". The mountain rocks, throwing off the king's soldiers and the young man returns safe and sound!

The young man does not flee or give up! He has a mission. The king is frustrated with his return and orders his soldiers to cast him off in the middle of the sea. But once again the young man returns safe and all the soldiers drown.

The young man realises that the people are afraid and oppressed. His death might be the only means to accomplish his mission and draw people back to faith. He says to the king that the only way to kill him is to gather all people, pin him to a tree trunk and shoot him with the young man’s arrow while hailing, “In the Name of Allah, the young man’s God!” Consider how he sacrificed his life to portray his message to everyone. On so doing, the king becomes unrobed of his false divinity. Consequently, the people announce their faith and the young man dies victorious.

**Obstinate Tyranny**

Now that the people have believed, the king retorts with increased tyranny and oppression. He ordered his troops to dig trenches of fire to burn those who insist on their faith. But the boy's sacrifice has truly aroused these people with firm faith and unrelenting belief. They walk right into the trenches of fire announcing that their hearts will never submit to the king.

The death of thousands is indeed not the perfect end. However, the concept of the oneness of Allah deserves sacrifices even if the price is one’s life. To Allah it is not the end! There is more yet to come on the Day of Judgment.

**Contemplate Surat Al-Bur‍uj (The Constellations)**

**وَالسَّمَاءِ ذَاتِ الْبُرُوجِ (١)وَالْيَوْمِ الْمَوْعُودِ (٢)وَشَاهِدٍ وَمَشْهُودٍ (٣)قُتِلَ أَصْحَابُ الأخْدُودِ (٤)النَّارِ ذَاتِ الْوَقُودِ (٥)إِذْ هُمْ عَلَيْهَا قُعُودٌ (٦)وَهُمْ عَلَى مَا يَفْعَلُونَ بِالْمُؤْمِنِينَ شُهُودٌ (٧)وَمَا نَقَمُوا مِنْهُمْ إِلا أَنْ يُؤْمِنُوا بِاللَّهِ الْعَزِيزِ الْحَمِيدِ (٨)الَّذِي لَهُ مُلْكُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالأرْضِ وَاللَّهُ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ شَهِيدٌ (٩)إِنَّ الَّذِينَ فَتَنُوا الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ ثُمَّ لَمْ يَتُوبُوا فَلَهُمْ عَذَابُ جَهَنَّمَ وَلَهُمْ عَذَابُ الْحَرِيقِ (١٠)إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ لَهُمْ جَنَّاتٌ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الأنْهَارُ ذَلِكَ الْفَوْزُ الْكَبِيرُ (١١)إِنَّ بَطْشَ رَبِّكَ لَشَدِيدٌ (١٢)إِنَّهُ هُوَ يُبْدِئُ وَيُعِيدُ (١٣)وَهُوَ الْغَفُورُ الْوَدُودُ**

“And (by) the heaven comprising the constellations. And (by) the promised Day. And (by the) witness and the witnessed,, Slain were the companions of the Trench, Of the fire comprising (abounding) fuel, As they were seated over it, And were (themselves) witnesses of what they performed against the believers. And in no way did they seek vengeance on them except that they believed in Allah, The Ever-Mighty, The Ever-Praiseworthy, Who has the Kingdom of the heavens and the earth, and Allah is Ever-Present Witness over everything. Surely the ones who tested the male believers and the female believers, (and) thereafter they have not repented, then they will have the torment of Hell, and they will (also) have the torment of the burning. Surely the ones who have believed and done deeds of righteousness will have Gardens from beneath which rivers run; that is the great triumph. Surely your Lord’s assault is strict indeed. Surely He, Ever He, starts and He brings (you) back. And He is The Ever-Forgiving, The Ever-Affectionate, The Owner of the Throne, The Ever-Glorious,” (85:1-15).

For those of us who like to hear a happy ending, the king is haunted by nightmares. Christian Ethiopia, moved into Yemen to oust the king, but he flees with his horse right into the sea and drowns.

There is a lot to be learnt from this story: Develop your self-confidence. Widen your circle of influence by helping people and loving them. Live for a mission. Have a vision ahead of you and a heart warm with faith and conviction and you will fare well in this life and in the Hereafter