



JUMU'AH LECTURE: HEROES OF YARMŪK



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Jumu'ah Bayaan: Heroes of Yarmūk

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ نَحْمَدُهُ وَنَسْتَعِينُهُ وَنَسْتَغْفِرُهُ وَنُؤْمِنُ بِهِ وَنَتَوَكَّلُ عَلَيْهِ وَنَعُوذُ بِاللَّهِ مِنْ شُرُورِ أَنْفُسِنَا وَمِنْ سَيِّئَاتِ أَعْمَالِنَا مَنْ يَهْدِهِ اللَّهُ فَلَا مُضِلَّ لَهُ وَمَنْ يُضِلِّهِ اللَّهُ فَلَا هَادِيَ لَهُ وَنَشْهَدُ أَنْ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَحْدَهُ لَا شَرِيكَ لَهُ وَنَشْهَدُ أَنَّ سَيِّدَنَا وَمَوْلَانَا مُحَمَّدًا عَبْدَهُ وَرَسُولَهُ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ وَأَصْحَابِهِ وَبَارَكَ وَسَلَّمَ تَسْلِيمًا كَثِيرًا أَمَّا بَعْدُ فَأَعُوذُ بِاللَّهِ مِنَ الشَّيْطَانِ الرَّجِيمِ بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ وَعَدَ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مِنْكُمْ وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ لَيَسْتَخْلِفَنَّهُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ كَمَا اسْتَخْلَفَ الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ وَلَيُمَكِّنَنَّ لَهُمْ دِينَهُمُ الَّذِي ارْتَضَى لَهُمْ وَلَيُبَدِّلَنَّهُمْ مِنْ بَعْدِ خَوْفِهِمْ أَمْنًا يَعْبُدُونَنِي لَا يُشْرِكُونَ بِي شَيْئًا وَمَنْ كَفَرَ بَعْدَ ذَلِكَ فَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْفَاسِقُونَ

السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته

The Ṣaḥābah of the Prophet ﷺ are the most virtuous group of people to walk the face of the earth after the Ambiyā' ﷺ. They have been praised in numerous verses of the Qur'ān as well as the noble Ḥadīth of the Prophet ﷺ. Their great feats and services for Islam can fill volumes, both during the lifetime of the Prophet ﷺ and after his demise. It was they who were chosen to accompany the Prophet ﷺ and to be his Companions, an honour for which they sacrificed their lives and wealth. They set the bar for devotion and dedication to the Dīn, for which every Muslim should strive for. We are encouraged to emulate them and follow in their footsteps. Truly they are our Heroes, worthy of emulation.

‘Abd Allāh ibn Masūd رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ said:

مَنْ كَانَ مُسْتَنًّا فَلْيَسْتَنَّ بِعَمَلٍ قَدْ مَاتَ فَإِنَّ الْحَيَّ لَا تُؤْمَنُ عَلَيْهِ الْفِتْنَةُ. أُولَئِكَ أَصْحَابُ مُحَمَّدٍ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ كَانُوا أَفْضَلَ هَذِهِ الْأُمَّةِ أَبْرَهًا قُلُوبًا وَأَعَمَقَهَا عِلْمًا وَأَقْلَاهَا تَكَلُّفًا اخْتَارَهُمُ اللَّهُ لِصُحْبَةِ نَبِيِّهِ وَإِلِقَامَةِ دِينِهِ فَأَعْرِفُوا لَهُمْ فَضْلَهُمْ وَأَتَّبِعُوهُمْ عَلَى آثَارِهِمْ وَتَمَسَّكُوا بِمَا اسْتَطَعْتُمْ مِنْ أَخْلَاقِهِمْ وَسِيرِهِمْ فَإِنَّهُمْ كَانُوا عَلَى الْهُدَى الْمُسْتَقِيمِ.

If anyone follows someone's custom let him follow the custom of one who is dead, for one cannot be sure of the living not being led astray. Those to follow are Muhammad's Companions who were the most excellent among the people, purest in heart, most profound in knowledge, most unassuming, whom Allah chose for companionship with His Prophet and to establish His religion. So, recognise their excellence, follow their traces, and hold as fast as you can to their character and way of life, for they followed right guidance. [Mishkāt al-Maṣābīḥ, 193]

The Prophet ﷺ is undoubtedly the ideal role model and the ultimate hero a person should have in his life. Inculcating within himself the character, practices, and noble habits of the Prophet ﷺ are the dictates of one's īmān. We, however, often look to others and especially in this day and age of pop culture and technological advancement, we often wish to imitate those whose lives flash on our TV screens: actors, actresses, musicians, and/or even soccer stars. We imitate them and idolise them, dressing like them and even attempting to be like them.

Ibn Masūd رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ summed it up beautifully in the narration above, it is as if it were specifically for those of us living in this era who are in constant need of idealising someone. If there is truly a group of people worthy of emulation then undoubtedly the Ṣaḥābah of the Prophet ﷺ, those who made their ideal and goal emulation of the Prophet ﷺ. Because emulating them is in effect following in the footsteps of the Prophet ﷺ, which they themselves so meticulously followed. These are our heroes and the heroes of every Muslim.

During the lifetime of the Prophet ﷺ, they sacrificed their wealth and lives for the cause of Islam. They bled for him on the battlefield and stood alongside him in every adversity. After the Prophet ﷺ passed away, they carried the flag of Islam to the four corners of the world. In so doing, they faced many obstacles and had to overcome many challenges. Always outnumbered, the odds always against them; it was only their deep-rooted faith and reliance of Allah that kept them steadfast and resulted in the mercy of Allah blowing in their favour.

In taking this dīn to the rest of the world, they had to face off against the various superpowers of that time: the Persians and the Romans. The Prophet ﷺ had already fought against the Romans during his lifetime, and after his demise

they were even more determined to extinguish the light of Islam. Sayyidunā Abū Bakr رضي الله عنه was appointed as Khalīfah after the Prophet ﷺ, and after dealing with the various apostate tribes in the Arabian Peninsula, he now turned his attention to the threats on the borders of the Islamic empire.

Armies were despatched to Iraq to deal with the Persians and to Syria as well to deal with the Romans. The Ṣaḥābah in both these regions were met with initial success, the mighty Persians and Romans suffering defeat at the hands of a small Muslim force. This enraged them and their hostilities only intensified. Greatly outnumbered, the Muslims in Iraq finally suffered defeat against the Persians.

Sayyidunā Khālīd ibn Walīd رضي الله عنه had been sent to deal with the apostate Musaylamah—the Liar, and had just defeated the 40 000 strong army of Musaylamah in the Battle of Yamāmah when news of what had transpired in Iraq reached Sayyidunā Abū Bakr رضي الله عنه. He immediately sent word to Sayyidunā Khālīd رضي الله عنه instructing him take his army from Yamāmah and proceed to Iraq, to assist the Muslims. Their wounds from the Battle of Yamāmah had barely even dried, when this instruction from the Khalīfah arrived, and without any hesitation or complaint, Sayyidunā Khālīd ibn Walīd رضي الله عنه prepared his army for this perilous march of over 1000 km from Yamāmah to Iraq. After such a gruelling journey, Sayyidunā Khālīd and his men رضي الله عنه did not even have time to catch their breath when they were flung into battle. These reinforcements, and the arrival of Khālīd ibn Walīd رضي الله عنه—his expertise and crafty strategies—boosted the morale of the Muslims and infused them with fervour and courage. The tides turned against the Persians and the Muslims attained victory after victory.

While this was going on in Iraq, the situation in Syria was turning against the Muslims. The Romans had not taken the arrival of the Muslim army seriously, and thinking that they were better trained and much more experienced would easily defeat them. They were sorely mistaken, and the Muslim generals Sayyidunā Abū ‘Ubaydah, Sayyidunā ‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ, Sayyidunā Yazīd ibn Abī Sufyān رضي الله عنه had managed to capture a number of regions within Syria. Fearing he would lose Syria entirely, the Roman Emperor Heraclius, sent reinforcements to his garrisons in the region. And, thus, the Muslims were slowly being driven back, and Sayyidunā Abū Bakr رضي الله عنه was now informed of the change in the situation.

Sayyidunā Abū Bakr رضي الله عنه once again wrote to Sayyidunā Khālīd ibn Walīd رضي الله عنه with the instruction to take an army and proceed to Syria and assist his brothers there. Sayyidunā Khālīd ibn Walīd رضي الله عنه had just finished defeating the Persian army in his 14th major battle against them, when this messaged arrived. Sayyidunā Khālīd رضي الله عنه in true Sayfullāh—THE SWORD OF ALLAH—fashion did not complain nor excuse himself, but readied his army for another arduous journey.

But Sayyidunā Khālīd رضي الله عنه thought to himself that he cannot take the regular route, or the king’s road, as this will alert the Romans of his movements, so the Ṣaḥābah took a different route and marched approximately 1300 km from Hirah in Iraq to Busrā in Syria, 300 km of the journey across the Syrian desert which is one of the most arid deserts in the world. And once again, upon arrival in Syria, gets straight into battle, turning the tides back in favour of the Muslims. [al-Bidāyah wa al-Nihāyah]

Seeing no other option now, Heraclius decides to send a huge force of over 240 000 men under his most experienced generals to finally annihilate the Muslim threat. The Ṣaḥābah who had been fighting in various regions in Syria, decide now to consolidate all of their forces in one place. The Ṣaḥābah rallied together at a place called Yarmūk, where they were met with additional reinforcements from Ḥijāz, their total number now brought to 40 000. Even with reinforcements and a consolidated force, the noble Ṣaḥābah are outnumbered 6:1. Troops were positioned and the battle about to begin; the epic knoww as the Battle of Yarmūk.

Bahān, the Commander of the Roman army, sought to meet Khālīd before the Battle and Khālīd agreed. Bahān proudly and haughtily said to Khālīd, “We know that you have been driven out of your native land due to hunger and poverty.

We shall give each one of you ten gold coins, garments, and food, then you may return to your land. Next year we will send you the same.” The Roman commander thought he could break the morale of the Companions with these insulting remarks, but Khālīd رضي الله عنه on the other hand listened to these insulting words calmly and then responded, “It is not hunger that has driven us out but we are a people who drink blood and we have learnt that no blood is as good as Roman blood, so, we have come for it.” [*al-Bidāyah wa al-Nihāyah*]

Among the 240 000 Roman army were 60 000 Christian Arabs: the Roman generals decided to send the 60 000 Christian Arabs forward first, saying, “Let these Arabs deal with their Arab brethren, and then the rest of us can go home.” And, thus, the first Roman contingent is sent forward for Battle. The Ṣaḥābah quickly consulted one another on how to proceed, and all say to let them come, we will deal with them then face the next. Sayyidunā Abū ‘Ubaydah seeing that Sayyidunā Khālīd ibn Walīd رضي الله عنه had not said a word, asked him to weigh in on their situation. Khālīd رضي الله عنه said that his view is different to the others. He said that the Romans are only sending a small contingent from their forces, were we to engage them with our entire army, the remaining forces will flank us while we are distracted with fighting. The Ṣaḥābah realise what Khālīd was saying was true and asked him to suggest the manner on how to proceed. Khālīd رضي الله عنه then advised that just as they have sent a small contingent to fight so too should we send a small contingent to fight theirs, and I am prepared to lead that platoon. Ṣaḥābah all agree and ask how many men does he need, Sayyidunā Khālīd رضي الله عنه replied, “Give me 30 men!” The Ṣaḥābah are shocked, 30 against 60 000, Sayyidunā Abū Sufyān رضي الله عنه—who once led the forces of the disbelievers before Islam was now fighting for the cause of Islam, making amends for his past mistakes—he immediately said to Khālīd رضي الله عنه that 30 against 60 000 is impossible and practically suicide, he should take more to give them a better chance. Take 60 instead of 30 so that each man will only have to fight a 1000 as opposed to fighting 2000. Subḥān Allāh, even Abū Sufyān رضي الله عنه thinks that 60 Muslims against 60 000 disbelievers was a fair fight. But Khālīd ibn Walīd is after all Khālīd ibn Walīd, Sayfullāh—the Sword of Allah—as the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم had named him. He instantly replies, “O Abu Sufyan, you were so brave in pre-Islamic times so do not be cowardly in Islam. See which Muslim warriors I will select and you will see that they are such men who have gifted their lives to Allah and desire nothing through their fighting except Allah himself. Allah knows who possesses these qualities and it will be His responsibility to aid him even if he were to cross repulsive fires.”

Sayyidunā Khālīd’s رضي الله عنه level of Tawakkul on Allah سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى to us would seem astonishing indeed. But one should remember this is after all that illustrious general who went charging into numerous battles before this already with the odds stacked against him. He is the one who was given a drink laced with poison by the Persians when he was in Iraq and when told they had poisoned it, he recited Bismillāh and still drank it, and no harm came to him after that. [*Musannaf ibn Abī Shaybah*, 18/258]

Nonetheless, Sayyidunā Abū ‘Ubaydah رضي الله عنه agreed with Abū Sufyān and instructed Khālīd رضي الله عنه to take 60 men instead. Sayyidunā Khālīd رضي الله عنه handpicked his soldiers, from the prime Companions of the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم—the Muhājirīn and Anṣār—and with these sixty men delivered a resounding defeat to the contingent of 60 000, with the help of Allah. [*Ibn Asākir*]

When we read about these Battles in the pages of history, then most often we fail to grasp the severity that the Ṣaḥābah had to endure and the true sincerity and beauty of their steadfastness. The accounts of these incidents cover 10, 20, or maybe 30 pages or more; which we then manage to read in one sitting or two, and with that the Battle ends for us. The reality, however, was that these Battles lasted for a number of days, every minute of each day either engaged in combat or on guard fearing attack. There were times when the Muslims had the advantage and there were times when the opposition managed to break the ranks of the Muslims.

At one point the cavalry of the Muslims was routed, and they began to retreat only to have their way blocked by the women folk. Hind bint ‘Utbah came carrying a tent peg, followed by the Muhājirāt, she came to the Muslim horsemen

of the right-wing and called out, “Why are you fleeing? Do you flee from Allah and Jannah when Allah is watching you?” When she saw her husband Abū Sufyān رضي الله عنه, fleeing, she struck his horse in the face with a tent-peg and said, “Where do you think you are going, O Sakhr? Go back to battle and put great effort into it until you compensate for having incited people in the past against Rasūlullāh صلى الله عليه وسلم.” Her words made him turn back to the battle and he rallied the Muslims again and they followed his lead. [*Futūḥ al-Shām*, 1/196]

Among the warriors that day was Zubayr ibn al-‘Awwām رضي الله عنه—the cousin of the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم. Some brave warriors came to him and suggested he lead them in a charge against the enemy. Zubayr replied, “If I lead, you people will not be able to keep up with me and fail to support me.” They said, “No, we will support you.” So, Zubayr attacked them and pierced through their lines, and went beyond them and none of his companions could keep up with him. He then turned around and fought his way back until he returned. One of the enemies then got hold of the bridle of his (horse) and struck him two blows (with the sword) on his shoulder. Between these two wounds there was a scar caused by a blow, he had received on the day of Badr (battle).

The gash left by these two blows was so deep that Urwah ibn Zubayr narrated, “When I was a child I used to play with those scars by putting my fingers in them.” [*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, # 3975]

‘Ikrimah ibn Abī Jahal, the son of Abū Jahal, had embraced Islam on the Day of the conquest of Makkah, and thereafter dedicated his life to the cause of Islam. He was with Khālīd رضي الله عنه and the Muhājirīn and Anṣār when they fought against the Apostates, Musaylamah—the Liar, in the Battle of Yamāmah. He was then sent to Syria by Sayyidunā Abū Bakr رضي الله عنه and led his troops to a number of victories against the Romans. Here he stood at Yarmūk now, gazing at this large Roman army charging at them like a huge wave about to crush them. He called out, “Who will pledge allegiance to me to fight to the death?” Khālīd رضي الله عنه cautions ‘Ikrimah, “Do not do that, O ‘Ikrimah, for verily your death will be an unbearable loss upon the Muslims.” But ‘Ikrimah رضي الله عنه replied, “Leave me be, O Khālīd! Verily you preceded me in going to the side of the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم but as for my father and I, we were the severest enemies of the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم. Leave me so that I may compensate for my wrongs of the past. How can it be that I stood firm when fighting against the Prophet and now flee when I am fighting for Islam?” He then called on the Muslims to rally to him and four hundred brave souls immediately answered his call. Together they managed to drive the enemy back, many of them attaining martyrdom in the process. [*al-Bidāyah wa al-Nihāyah*]

Three of them lay injured in the battlefield, ‘Ikrimah, Ḥārith ibn Hishām, and ‘Ayyāsh ibn Abī Rabī‘ah. Ḥārith called out for some water, and as it arrived he gazed upon ‘Ikrimāh and seeing him in greater need of it, instructed that it be given to ‘Ikrimah instead. When it reached ‘Ikrimah, he gazed at ‘Ayyāsh and saw him in need of it, and thus instructed that it be given to him. When the person reached ‘Ayyāsh, he found that he had already passed on and so returned quickly back to Ḥārith only to find that he too had passed on. So, he rushed to ‘Ikrimah and discovered that he too had passed away. All three passed on without having even a sip of that water, giving preference to his Companion who lay beside him. May Allah grant them to drink from the refreshing ponds of Jannah. [*Suwar min Ḥayāt al-Ṣaḥābah*, pg. 123]

The Battle of Yarmūk lasted six days, 40 000 against an army of 240 000, every move, every decision one which could result in victory or defeat. Allah’s سبحانه وتعالى mercy and assistance descended, and despite the odds being against them, the Ṣaḥābah were victorious. This was a humiliating defeat for the Roman, one which they failed to recover from, and after this the remaining cities in Syria fell like dominoes, and the flag of Tawḥīd was raised. May Allah reward these personalities abundantly, because of whose steadfastness the dīn of Islam spread. 3000 Ṣaḥābah were martyred in this Battle. [*al-Bidāyah wa al-Nihāyah*]

After the Battle of Yarmūk, the Ṣaḥābah continued their conquest of Syria and region after region came under the banner of Tawḥīd with very little resistance from the Romans, until the Battle of Ajnadayn. The leader of the Muslims

was Sayyidunā ‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ رضي الله عنه with a force of 10 000 and the commander of the Romans was Artabun, one of their most intelligent and shrewdest commanders, with a force of 100 000. Having to face off against such a formidable force, Sayyidunā ‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ رضي الله عنه wrote to Sayyidunā ‘Umar رضي الله عنه for reinforcements, citing in his letter that the Commander of the Romans was Artabun. Sayyidunā ‘Umar رضي الله عنه wrote back to ‘Amr رضي الله عنه saying, “We have sent against the Roman Artabun the Arab Artabun [referring to Sayyidunā ‘Amr رضي الله عنه], let us see who wins.” It was the ultimate battle of wits, cunning and strategy; and Sayyidunā ‘Amr رضي الله عنه outthought his opponent and with the help of Allah another resounding defeat was given to the Romans which historians write was just as significant as the victory in the Battle of Yarmūk. It was this victory that opened the doors to the liberation of al-Masjid al-Aqsā, Sayyidunā ‘Amr رضي الله عنه proceeding immediately from his victory at Ajnadayn to lay siege to Jerusalem. [*al-Bidāyah wa al-Nihāyah*]

Whenever al-Masjid al-Aqsā is spoken of, usually it is the name of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn that comes to mind, and understandably so, as he is the great general who liberated it from the Crusaders. Similarly, Constantinople is regarded as an Ottoman achievement. Without a doubt, these victories that came later deserve to be lauded and their leaders praised and held in esteem. But we should never lose sight of the fact that the ground work for every victory that the Muslims achieved later was laid by the noble Ṣaḥābah in the early years of Islam. It was they who set the standard for self-sacrifice, courage, and bravery. It is from their glorious achievements that all who came after them drew strength. Truly they are the originals, the first heroes, and those most worthy of emulation.

Sayyidunā ‘Abd Allāh ibn Masūd رضي الله عنه said it best, and we repeat his words again as we conclude.

مَنْ كَانَ مُسْتَنًا فَلْيَسْتَنَّ بِمَنْ قَدْ مَاتَ فَإِنَّ الْحَيَّ لَا يُؤْمَنُ عَلَيْهِ الْفِتْنَةُ. أُولَئِكَ أَصْحَابُ مُحَمَّدٍ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ كَانُوا أَفْضَلَ هَذِهِ الْأُمَّةِ أَبْرَهًا قُلُوبًا وَأَعَمَقَهَا عِلْمًا وَأَقْلَهَا تَكَلُّفًا اخْتَارَهُمُ اللَّهُ لِصُحْبَةِ نَبِيِّهِ وَلِإِقَامَةِ دِينِهِ فَاعْرِفُوا لَهُمْ فَضْلَهُمْ وَاتَّبِعُوهُمْ عَلَى آثَارِهِمْ وَتَمَسَّكُوا بِمَا اسْتَطَعْتُمْ مِنْ أَخْلَاقِهِمْ وَسِيرِهِمْ فَإِنَّهُمْ كَانُوا عَلَى الْهَدْيِ الْمُسْتَقِيمِ.

If anyone follows someone’s custom let him follow the custom of one who is dead, for one cannot be sure of the living not being led astray. Those to follow are Muhammad’s Companions who were the most excellent among the people, purest in heart, most profound in knowledge, most unassuming, whom Allah chose for companionship with His Prophet and to establish His religion. So, recognise their excellence, follow their traces, and hold as fast as you can to their character and way of life, for they followed right guidance. [*Mishkāt al-Maṣābīḥ*, 193]

As the poet said:

أُولَئِكَ آبَائِي فَجَنِّني بِمِثْلِهِمْ

These are my forefathers, so bring for me the likes of them.

May Allah سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى inspire us to follow in the footsteps of these great personalities and infuse within us a deep love for them, the disciples of Muḥammad صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ, and for their teacher and mentor Sayyidunā Muḥammad صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ, and unite us with all of them in the everlasting gardens of Paradise.