

FRIDAY SERMON

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We are reading from the book Essence of Islam Volume 2 about what Hazrat Masih Maood(as) has said about salvation. We read two extracts last week. Today we will continue with some more. Hazrat Masih Maood(as) said:

“After deep reflection and the receipt of constant revelation from God, I have come to know that though there are a large number of religious sects in this country and religious differences swell up like a flood, the cause of all these contentions is that most people suffer from a decline of the spiritual faculties and of the fear of God.

The heavenly light by means of which man can distinguish between truth and falsehood has disappeared from most hearts. The world is taking on the colour of atheism and though the tongues utter the words ‘God’ and ‘*Permeshwar*’, the hearts are more and more inclined towards denial. This is testified to in practice by an absence of good actions. I do not question the integrity of anyone who practices righteousness in secret, but the general condition is that the true purpose of religion is ignored. Most people pay little attention to **purity of heart, true love of the Divine**, true sympathy with His creatures, gentleness, mercy, justice, meekness and all other pure moral qualities like righteousness, cleanliness and truth which are the spirit of religion. It is a matter of regret that religious contentions are on the increase, but spirituality is declining.

The real purpose of religion is to recognize God Who has created the universe and to arrive in His love at a stage where the love of everything else is burnt up and to have sympathy with His creatures and to put on the garment of true purity. I observe, however, that this purpose is neglected in this age and most people adhere to some branch of atheism. The recognition of God Almighty has sadly declined and for this reason boldness in committing sin is increasing. It is obvious that that which is not recognized is not followed by the heart, nor is there any love for it or any fear of it. All types of fear and love and appreciation are created by recognition.

This shows that the prevalence of sin in today’s world is due to lack of understanding. One of the great signs of a true religion is that it should present many means of acquiring the recognition and understanding of God Almighty so that man might be able to restrain himself from committing sin, and so that becoming aware of Divine beauty he should partake of perfect love and so that he should regard cutting asunder from God as worse than hell. **To avoid sin and to be devoted to the love of God Almighty is a grand goal for man and is that true comfort which can be described as heavenly life.** All desires that

are opposed to the pleasure of God are the fire of hell and to spend one's life in their pursuit is to lead a hellish life.

But the question is how can one be delivered from such a life? The knowledge that God has bestowed upon me in this context is that deliverance from this house of fire depends upon true and perfect understanding of the Divine. Carnal passions that pull people to themselves constitute an irresistible flood which is flowing fiercely to destroy faith, and it is impossible to stem that which is irresistible except through that which is perfect and overwhelming in itself. For this reason, perfect understanding of the Divine is needed for the attainment of salvation. [Lecture Lahore, Ruhani Khaza'in, vol. 20, pp. 147-149]

He said further:

“O my dear ones ! It is a true and tried philosophy that to escape sin, man needs perfect understanding and not any type of atonement. I tell you truly that if the people of Noah had attained the perfect understanding which creates perfect fear, they would not have been drowned, if the people of Lot had been bestowed that understanding, they would not have been subjected to a rain of stones, and if this country had been bestowed that recognition of the Divine Being which makes one tremble with fear, it would not have suffered ruin from the plague as it did. But deficient understanding yields no benefits, nor can its result, which is fear and love, be perfect. The faith that is not perfect is useless and the love that is not perfect is useless, and the fear that is not perfect is useless, and the understanding that is not perfect is useless, and the food and drink that are not perfect are useless. Can your hunger be satisfied with a grain of food or can your thirst be quenched by a drop of water?

Then, O ye who have little resolve and exercise little effort in the search for truth, how can you hope for great Divine grace in return for a little love and a little fear? To purify a person from sin and to fill his heart with love of the Divine is the work of the All-Powerful One, and to establish the fear of His greatness in any heart is dependent upon His will. The eternal law of nature is that all this is bestowed after perfect understanding.

The root of fear and love and appreciation is perfect understanding. He who is bestowed perfect understanding is bestowed perfect fear and perfect love, and he who is bestowed perfect fear and perfect love is delivered from every sin which arises from fearlessness. **For such deliverance we need no blood and no cross and no atonement. We need a sacrifice of self which need is felt by our nature. This sacrifice is in other words Islam.** The meaning of Islam is to stretch forth one's neck for slaughter; that is to say, to place one's soul at the threshold of God with complete willingness. **The name Islam is the soul of all law and is the life of all commandments.** To stretch forth one's neck for slaughter willingly and cheerfully demands perfect love and devotion, and perfect love calls for perfect understanding. The word Islam indicates that for true sacrifice perfect understanding and perfect love are needed and nothing else. This is indicated by Allah the Exalted in the verse:

لَنْ يَنَالَ اللَّهَ لُحُومُهَا وَلَا دِمَاؤُهَا وَلَكِنْ يَنَالُهُ التَّقْوَىٰ مِنْكُمْ

Neither their blood nor their flesh reaches Allah but it is your righteousness that reaches Him(22:38)

This means that the sacrificial meat you offer cannot reach Me, nor can its blood. On the contrary, the only sacrifice that reaches Me is that you shall fear Me, and be righteous for My sake. [Lecture Lahore, Ruhani Khaza'in, vol. 20, pp. 150-152]

Speaking about why it is not enough to just have faith to get salvation, Hazrat Masih Maood(as) said:

“It may be asked that if the blood of Jesus cannot purify from sin, as indeed it cannot, then is there any way of being purified from sin, for a sinful life is worse than death. My answer to this question, which I set forth with full force from my personal experience, is that from the time that man was created up to today there has been only one means of escaping sin and disobedience. That means is that through convincing arguments and shining signs a person should arrive at the understanding which truly makes God manifest, and through which one realizes that God's wrath is a consuming fire, and which proves through a manifestation of Divine beauty that every perfect delight is in God. In other words, through such understanding all veils are lifted from glory and beauty. This is the only way by which passions are restrained and man experiences inner change. On hearing this answer many people will exclaim: Do we not believe in God; do we not fear God and love Him; does not the whole world, with few exceptions, believe in God? Then why is it that they commit all manner of sins and appear involved in diverse forms of wickedness?

The answer to this is **that faith is one thing and understanding is another**. I do not mean that a believer avoids sin, but I mean that a man of perfect understanding avoids it, that is to say a person who has tasted both the fear of God and the love of God. Someone might ask: Why is Satan disobedient though he possesses perfect understanding? The answer is that Satan does not possess that perfect understanding which is bestowed upon the fortunate ones. It is part of human nature that man is necessarily influenced by perfect knowledge and that he does not place himself in the way of ruin when he beholds its terrible countenance. Faith only means to believe as the result of thinking well of a thing; but understanding means to behold that in which one has put one's faith. Thus, understanding and sin cannot exist together in a heart as day and night cannot co-exist at the same time. It is your daily experience that when something proves to be useful, one is immediately attracted towards it and when something is proved to be harmful, one begins to fear it. For instance, if a person does not know that what he has in his hand is arsenic he might swallow a large dose of it deeming it to be some useful medicine. But he who knows that it is a fatal poison will not swallow even the smallest quantity of it, for he would realize that by the eating of it he would pass out from this world. In the same way, when a person knows for certain that God undoubtedly exists and that every type of sin is punishable in His estimation, all sins automatically fall away from him.”

Speaking about why despite our belief in God we continue to sin and how to avoid doing so Hazrat Masih Maood(as) said:

“Someone might raise the question that while we know that God exists and we also know that sins will be punished, yet we commit sins, which shows that we need some other way of avoiding sin. Our answer would still be that which we have already given. It is not at all

possible that realizing fully that with the commission of a sin its punishment would fall upon you like lightning, you would yet dare to commit sin. This is the philosophy that is not open to any objection or exception. Reflect well that when you are quite certain of being punished for a sin, you will not act contrary to this certainty. Would you thrust your hand into the fire? Would you jump down from the top of a mountain? Would you jump into a well? Would you lie down in front of a running train? Would you thrust your arm into the mouth of a tiger? Would you present your foot to a mad dog? Can you stay somewhere where lightning is striking repeatedly? Do you not run out quickly from a room the roof of which is about to fall down? Is there any one of you who would not jump out of bed on perceiving a poisonous snake in it? Is there anyone who would not run out of a room in which he is sleeping and in which a fire has broken out? Tell me, why do you do this and run away from all these harmful things, but do not run away from the sins to which I have drawn your attention? The only answer that a wise person can give after full reflection is that there is a difference of knowledge in the two cases. In the matter of sins, the knowledge of most people is defective. They consider sins as evil, but do not look upon them as they look upon a tiger or a serpent. Hidden in their minds is the notion that the punishment of sins is not certain. They even doubt the existence of God and if they believe in His existence, they doubt whether the soul survives after death; and if it survives death, they do not know whether there is any punishment for these sins. They may not be conscious of it, yet most of them have these notions hidden in their minds. But with regard to those occasions of danger of which I have cited instances, and which they avoid, they are certain that if they did not move away from them, they would be destroyed and so they run away. Even if they encounter any of them by chance, they run away from it in terror.

Thus, the truth is that with regard to these things man has certain knowledge that they are fatal, but with regard to religious commandments their knowledge is not certain and is only speculation. One is a case of seeing and the other is only a story. Sins cannot be avoided by stories. I tell you truly that not one Jesus even if a thousand of them were to be crucified, they would not procure you true salvation, for it is only perfect fear or perfect love that rescues from sin. The death of Jesus upon the cross is in itself a fiction, and in any case, it has nothing to do with stemming the tide of sin. This is a claim which is all darkness. Experience does not support it, nor is there any relationship between the suicide of Jesus and the forgiveness of other peoples' sins." (Essence of islam Vol 2 P257)

We will stop here for today. Incha Allah we will speak more next time. May Allah grant to each one among us true understanding. Ameen!