

Jesus and the service of his Lord

Friday Khutba by Dr Zahid Aziz, for Lahore Ahmadiyya UK, 25 December 2020

وَقَفَّيْنَا عَلَىٰ آثَارِهِم بِعِيسَى ابْنِ مَرْيَمَ مُصَدِّقًا لِّمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ مِنَ التَّوْرَةِ ۚ وَآتَيْنَاهُ الْإِنْجِيلَ فِيهِ هُدًى وَنُورٌ ۗ وَمُصَدِّقًا لِّمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ مِنَ التَّوْرَةِ وَهُدًى وَمَوْعِظَةً لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ ﴿٢٦﴾ وَلِيَحْكُمَ أَهْلَ الْإِنْجِيلِ بِمَا أَنزَلَ اللَّهُ فِيهِ ۗ وَمَن لَّمْ يَحْكَمْ بِمَا أَنزَلَ اللَّهُ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْفَاسِقُونَ ﴿٢٧﴾

“And We sent after them (i.e., after the Israelite prophets accepted by the Jews) in their footsteps Jesus, son of Mary, verifying what was (already) before him of the Torah; and We gave him the Gospel containing guidance and light, and verifying what was before it of the Torah, and a guidance and an admonition for the dutiful. And let the People of the Gospel judge by what Allah has revealed in it. And whoever does not judge by what Allah has revealed, those are the transgressors.” (The Quran, 5:46–47)

The topic of today’s *khutba* is related to the fact that today is Christmas Day, the most important Christian festival which is held to mark the birth of Jesus. According to the Quran, and hence according to Muslim belief, Jesus was the last of the prophets of the Israelites who arose after all those prophets who are accepted by the Jews. He too received guidance and light in his revelation, as had the previous Israelite prophets. The Quran, while correcting the wrong beliefs which his followers later came to hold, asks them to judge by the Gospels themselves. Now the Quran says:

“Certainly they disbelieve who say: Allah, He is the Messiah, son of Mary. And the Messiah said: O Children of Israel, serve Allah, my Lord and your Lord.” (5:72)

Judging by the Gospels, we read in them that just before Jesus commenced his mission of preaching he underwent the experience of temptation by the devil in the

wilderness. When the devil offered Jesus worldly kingdoms and their glory on condition that he worshipped the devil, Jesus replied:

“Away with you, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.’ ” (Matthew 4:10, Luke 4:8)

Here Jesus is quoting from the scriptures before him, and confirming them, by saying “For it is written”. As the Quran says, Jesus verified the Torah that had come before him, before he started preaching the Gospel. The above statement of Jesus appears in two of the four Gospels, Matthew and Luke. There is another statement of his which appears in Mark as follows. Jesus was asked by a literate and educated man: “Which is the first commandment of all?” He replied:

“The first of all the commandments is: ‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” (Gospel of Mark, ch. 12, v. 29–31)

The Gospels of Matthew (22:35–40) and Luke (10:25–28) mention a very similar incident, but in Jesus’ reply there the first part, “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one”, is absent. Still, the part about loving God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind, clearly means that there is only One God.

The Quran also says that on the Day of Judgment God will ask Jesus about the later beliefs which his followers came to hold:

“And when Allah will say: O Jesus, son of Mary, did you say to people, Take me and my mother for two gods besides Allah? He will say: Glory be to You! It was not for me to say what I had no right to (say). If I had said it, You would indeed have known it. You know what is in my mind, and I do not know what is in Your mind. Surely You are the great Knower of the unseen. I said to them

nothing but what You commanded me: Serve Allah, my Lord and your Lord; and I was a witness of them so long as I was among them, but when You caused me to die You were the Watcher over them. And You are Witness of all things.” (5:116–117)

An objection is raised that the Quran here considers that Christianity regards not only Jesus but also Mary, a god alongside the One God, but that in fact this is not a teaching of Christianity. This may be true in the case of Protestants and reformed sects of Christianity, but in the Catholic church and the Eastern orthodox churches it is an article of belief that Mary, after completing her life on earth, rose bodily to heaven. In 1950 the Pope issued a declaration that it is a Christian belief that she went to heaven body and soul. She is also called the mother of God. It is this kind of belief that the Quran is referring to, when it says that God will ask Jesus: “Did you say to people, Take me and my mother for two gods besides Allah?”

I have just read out the reply which, the Quran says, he will give: That he is not responsible of giving them such a teaching but he only taught them: Serve Allah, my Lord and your Lord. Moreover, he could only know of their condition and what they believed, and correct them, while he was among them, but after he died he could no longer know if they went on the wrong path or not. This shows that the common idea that Jesus is alive in heaven and will return to this world before the Day of Judgment is a wrong notion. If he came back into this world, he would know of his followers’ condition and what beliefs they held. He could not give the reply to God on the Day of Judgment that he does not know whether after him they adopted wrong beliefs or not.

In his reply to God, as quoted in the Quran, Jesus goes on to say in the next verse: “If You punish them, surely they are Your servants; and if You protect them, surely You are the Mighty, the Wise” (5:118). Jesus will plead for forgiveness for his followers, those who take his name, and will ask God to protect them from the wrong path. This indicates that at last, in the course of time, Christians will become established on the real teaching of Jesus: “Serve Allah, my Lord and your Lord”, a teaching not only attributed to him in the Quran but which is found in the Gospels as well.

In a hadith the Holy Prophet Muhammad has referred to this reply of Jesus. He said that on the Day of Judgment he will be told about some of his followers, that they turned their backs on Islam after he left them. He said: I will give the same reply as the reply of Jesus in the words: “I was a witness of them so long as I was among them, but when You caused me to die You were the Watcher over them. And You are Witness of all things. If You punish them, surely they are Your servants; and if You protect them, surely You are the Mighty, the Wise” (Bukhari, book 60: ‘Prophets’, hadith 3349). This shows that the Holy Prophet Muhammad took this verse to mean that Jesus is not alive but has passed away and will not return to this world, because the Holy Prophet envisaged that what Jesus said, about his dying, the Holy Prophet would also say the same about himself.

At the beginning I mentioned the temptation of Jesus by the devil, who showed Jesus “all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour” and said: “All this I will give you, if you will bow down and worship me” (Matthew, 4:8–9). Some eighteen hundred years after this, the followers of Jesus in Europe were given rule over almost all the world, and dominance of every kind, military, economic, scientific, technological, political, cultural etc. over the rest of the world. Did they achieve this mighty position by bowing down to the devil and ignoring the advice of Jesus to worship “only” the Lord God? That is a matter for them to ponder over, and not for us to offend others. What we can say is that to reach such a high and great position in the world, one does not need to ignore the worship of God and turn to worshipping the devil. The Holy Prophet Muhammad and his early followers showed in practice that it is possible to attain supreme heights in this world, and possess the kingdoms and the glory of this world, while still worshipping only the One God and completely shunning the devil.

بَارِكْ اللهُ لَنَا وَكُفِّرْ فِي الْقُرْآنِ الْعَظِيمِ، وَنَفَعْنَا وَإِيَّاكُمْ بِالآيَاتِ وَالذِّكْرِ الْحَكِيمِ، إِنَّهُ تَعَالَى جَوَادٌ كَرِيمٌ
مَلِكٌ بَرٌّ رَوْفٌ رَحِيمٌ-