

Part 24 Surah 39 Al-Zumar Verses 11-20

11-20 The Losers

Say: 'I am commanded to worship God, sincere in my faith in Him alone; (11)

and I am commanded to be the first to submit myself to Him.' (12)

Say: 'Indeed I would dread, were I to disobey my Lord, the suffering of an awesome day.' (13)

Say: 'God alone do I worship, sincere in my faith in Him alone. (14)

You can worship whatever you please instead of Him.' Say: 'True losers indeed are those who shall have lost their own selves and their families on Resurrection Day. Such is the ultimate loss.' (15)

Above them there shall be layers of fire, and layers of fire shall be beneath them. In this way God puts fear into His servants' hearts: 'My servants! Fear Me!' (16)

There is good news for those who shun the worship of false deities and turn to God, so give good news to My servants, (17)

who listen carefully to what is said and follow the best of it. These are the ones whom God has graced with His guidance, and these are the ones endowed with insight. (18)

How about one on whom God's sentence of punishment has been passed? Can you rescue those who are already in the fire? (19)

As against this, those who are God-fearing will have lofty mansions raised upon mansions high, beneath which running waters flow. This is God's promise. Never does God fail to fulfil His promise. (20)

Overview

This passage has the air of the hereafter stamped on it from start to finish: it highlights the fear of its punishment and the hope for its reward. It begins by a directive to the Prophet to declare God's oneness fully and without a trace of ambiguity. He further declares that he, a Prophet and a Messenger of God, dreads the consequences of any deviation from it. He unequivocally states his determination to follow his course, leaving the unbelievers to choose whatever method they want to follow, outlining the results to which each of the two ways leads.

We then have a picture showing the extent of the loss: "*Above them there shall be layers of fire, and layers of fire shall be beneath them. In this way God puts fear into His servants' hearts: My servants! Fear Me!*" (16) It is a scene that strikes real fear in people's hearts, showing the fire in layers that engulfs people from above and below. They are seen within these layers as they close in on them from all sides. Yet these layers are fire. God shows this picture to His servants while they are on earth and still have the chance to change their ways: "*In this way God puts fear into His servants' hearts...*" (16) He calls on them warning them so that they may choose the way to safety: "*My servants! Fear Me!*" (16)

On the other side stand those who are safe, having feared this fate and done what is necessary to avoid it:

There is good news for those who shun the worship of false deities and turn to God, so give good news to My servants, (17) who listen carefully to what is said and follow the best of it. These are the ones whom God has graced with His guidance, and these are the ones endowed with insight. (18)

'False deities' are referred to here by the word *taghut*, which implies an exaggerated sense of exceeding the bounds. Those who shun the worship of *taghut* are the ones who reject the worship of anyone other than God in any form whatsoever. They are the ones who turn to God, stand in front of Him and worship Him alone. These have good news issued to them directly from on high. The Prophet is giving them this good news by God's order: "*So give good news to My servants.*" (17) The fact that this news comes from on high and is delivered by the noble Messenger is in itself a great blessing.

One quality of such people is that they listen to whatever is being said, but their hearts and minds pick up only the best of it and discard the rest. Thus, the only words that they actually receive are the best words that improve and purify people's hearts and souls. A good soul is always ready to receive good words and respond to them, while the one which is foul receives only what is foul. "*These are the ones whom God has graced with His guidance...*" (18)" He knows that they are genuinely good in their hearts and souls and He, therefore, guided them to listen and respond to the best of what is said. Guidance comes only from God.

The First to Submit to God

Say: 'I am commanded to worship God, sincere in my faith in Him alone; (11) and I am commanded to be the first to submit myself to Him.' (12) Say: 'Indeed I would dread, were I to disobey my Lord, the suffering of an awesome day.' (13)

This declaration by the Prophet outlining what he is commanded to do with regard to worship, devotion and submission is very important in keeping the belief in God's oneness pure, as Islam wants it to be. In this respect, the Prophet is one of God's servants. He does not exceed that position. In their servitude to God, all people stand in one rank, while God has His sublime position over all creation.

Thus the two concepts of Godhead and servitude are well established and clearly distinguished. There can be no confusion between the two. Oneness is clearly seen as an attribute of God alone, in which no one else has any share. When Muhammad (peace be upon him) stands in the position of God's servant making this clear declaration, fearing to commit any disobedience of God, there can be no room for any claim of intercession by idols or angels granted through addressing worship to them instead of God.

The declaration is made once more, with the Prophet's announcement that he will stick to his way, leaving the idolaters to their way and the painful end to which that leads:

Say: 'God alone do I worship, sincere in my faith in Him alone. (14) You can worship whatever you please instead of Him.' Say: 'True losers indeed are those who shall have lost their own selves and their families on Resurrection Day. Such is the ultimate loss.' (15)

Once more the Prophet announces: I am unwavering in following my way, addressing all worship to God and submitting myself to Him alone. As for you, you can follow any way you want, worship whomever you wish, but this will lead you to the worst imaginable loss: a loss of oneself as one goes to hell, and the loss of family and kin, be they believers or unbelievers. If those relatives are believers, the idolaters will have lost them as each group goes their separate ways, and if they are unbelievers, the loss is the same as they all will have lost themselves in hell: "*Such is the ultimate loss.*" (15)

"*And these are the ones endowed with insight.*" (18) It is a sound mind that leads a person to self-purification and safety. Anyone who does not follow the way that ensures such safety appears to be deprived of a sound mind and insight, which are blessings given by God.

Before showing us the blessings these people enjoy in the life to come, the *surah* states that those who worshipped false deities have already reached hell. Who can save them from its fire, then? "*How about one on whom God's sentence of punishment has been passed? Can you rescue those who are already in the fire?*" (19) This address is made to the Prophet (peace be upon him). If he cannot save them from the fire, who else can?

They are pictured here as if they are already in the fire, since the sentence of punishment has been passed on them. Juxtaposed with this is the image of those who truly feared God:

As against this, those who are God-fearing will have lofty mansions raised upon mansions high, beneath which running waters flow. This is God's promise. Never does God fail to fulfil His promise. (20)

The scene depicts mansions raised upon high mansions, with streams flowing below. All this contrasts with the image of layers of fire engulfing the other group from above and below. Drawing such contrasts is a characteristic of the Qur'anic style. Such is God's promise, which will always come true.

Those Muslims who were the first to receive the Qur'an interacted with these scenes in their practical lives. To them, they were not mere promises or threats issued from afar, speaking about a distant future; they were a reality they saw and felt. Hence, they were truly influenced by them. Their lives on earth reflected the reality of the Hereafter which they felt and almost experienced while still extant in this life. It is in this way that a Muslim should receive God's promise.