

Abu Hurayrah narrated that God's Messenger (peace be upon him) said:

1

Hasten to do good deeds before troubles come thick like patches of night darkness,

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when a man may be a believer in the morning and becomes an unbeliever in the evening, or may be a believer in the evening, then become an unbeliever in the morning.

3

He sells his faith for some worldly gain.⁽¹⁾

1 Related by Muslim, 118.

From the Qur'an

- ﴿Hasten, all of you, to the achievement of your Lord's forgiveness, and a paradise as vast as the heavens and the earth, prepared for the God-fearing.﴾ (3: 133)
- ﴿Beware of temptation that does not lure only those among you who are wrongdoers. Know that God is severe in retribution.﴾ (25)
- ﴿Believers! Do not let your riches or your children make you oblivious of the remembrance of God. Those who do so will surely be the losers. (9) Give, then, out of what We have provided for you, before death comes to any of you, and then he says, 'My Lord, if You would grant me a delay for a short while, I would give in charity and be one of the righteous'. (10) God does not grant a delay to any soul when its term has come. God is fully aware of all that you do.﴾ (63: 9-11)

The Narrator

Abu Hurayrah's name is given differently in different reports, but it is said that he was 'Abd al-Rahmān ibn Şakhr al-Dawsī, from a branch of the Yemeni Azd. He was an orphan at birth and embraced Islam in the year in which the Battle of Khaybar took place, i.e. Year 7 of the Hijri calendar. He migrated to Madinah, despite having to go through a tough journey. He remained close to the Prophet (peace be upon him), and earned wide reputation for his knowledge of Hadith and for his fatwas. He had many students and was the companion who narrated the largest number of the Prophet's hadiths. He died in Madinah in Year 58 AH, 678 CE.

Summary

The Prophet (peace be upon him) directs his community to hasten to do good deeds before they have a time when troubles come thick and fast, causing people to go astray or weaken their faith. A person may be a good believer, but a day or a night passes and he becomes an unbeliever.



Message and Meaning



God's Messenger (peace be upon him) directs the believers to hasten to do good deeds and voluntary acts of worship before they encounter hard trials which he likens to patches of darkness on a very dark night with no visible moon. At such a time, people may not be able to distinguish between truth and falsehood. The Prophet also said: 'This community of yours is such that its best condition is at its beginning. Later, it will experience oppression and matters that you will reject. There will be waves of oppression which will make one another seem light. A wave of oppression may make a believer say: This will destroy me. But then it is lifted. Another then will come and a believer will say: This is certainly the one'.

The Prophet has urged us to do good deeds before the occurrence of trials because during times of oppression and strife, voluntary worship becomes difficult given people are burdened with worry. Therefore, the Prophet said: 'Worship during the time of turmoil is like migration to join me'. He also said: 'There will come a time when people feel that a person holding on to his faith is like one who is holding burning coals in his hand'.⁽¹⁾



The Prophet then tells us that those trials will be very severe. If one afflicts a Muslim, it may turn him away from his faith very quickly. It is as if it turns him away overnight, 'because people's hearts often seek to run loose from the strain of sticking to the truth and frequently look up to ways that lead astray. If they are attacked by some confusing thoughts, these will find ready recipients'.⁽²⁾ 'When trials and hardships come thick and fast, they confuse people and have a strong influence on them.'⁽³⁾



In such a situation, a person may sell his faith for a paltry price, which may come in the form of money, position, or some other worldly gain.

1 Related by al-Tirmidhī, 2260.

2 Ibn Hubayrah, *al-Ifṣāḥ 'an Ma'ānī al-Ṣiḥāḥ*, Vol. 8, p. 163.

3 Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Mufthim Limā Ashkal min Kitāb Muslim*, Vol. 1, p. 326.

Implementation



Start your good works now and attend to your worship and other rewarding actions, such as learning, teaching, marriage, maintaining good relations with relatives, etc. Do not think you have much time and delay such good work till tomorrow, or the day after, or 'until I am older', or 'until I have achieved this or that', etc. Hard times may come upon you and these may divert you from doing what is good and what your faith requires. Therefore, it is better to start now, without delay, lest impediments occur.



It often happens that a person delays some good work, hoping to be able to do it more perfectly in future, but then he does not offer any real progress. Thus, an author may delay publishing his book until he can get it absolutely perfect, or delay giving his wife a gift until he can buy the one she would like best, or delay reciting the Qur'an until he is in the best condition for such worship, etc. He continues to delay things but then he is overwhelmed with duties, or becomes weaker, etc. Had he done what was available and possible, he would have gathered much that is good.



Taking the initiative so as to do things without delay is a skill a person acquires by doing it several times. He may find it hard at first, and he may think that he is not doing well. Yet as time goes on, this becomes easier for him. He will be able to do good work with whatever is available to him. Therefore, it is important to acquire the habit of doing good work. Do not hesitate to offer even a good word or a small charitable donation or a casual, unplanned benefit you give to someone you know or to a stranger.



Get to know God in times of ease and prosperity, and He will know you in your time of adversity. Therefore, if you hasten to do good works when you have time, and are well and healthy, God will protect you during times of trial and hardship.



A Muslim should frequently pray to God to keep him firm in his faith and not to expose him to trials and temptation. The Prophet often said in his supplication: 'My Lord who turns hearts over, confirm my heart in Your faith'.⁽¹⁾



When a man is in the midst of a trial involving temptation, he may not be aware that he is selling his faith for a worthless gain. He may be complacent in a financial transaction, or accept to receive money which he has not earned, or he may be guilty of backbiting or may listen to some backbiting to please his boss. It is important that we should watch ourselves and take stock of what we do. We must not ignore what detracts from our faith, remembering always that no one has anything more precious than faith.

1 Related by Ahmad, 12107; al-Tirmidhī, 2140; Ibn Mājah, 3834.

