

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

THE VOICE OF THE PROPHETS

Sermon delivered by Imam Genghis Khan
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- Peace be with you all ... it's an honor for me to worship with you today ... We begin with Praise, Thanks, and Asking of God ...

Indeed, all Praise and Thanks belongs to God,

The Lord of all the Worlds

The Possessor of Mercy, The Bestower of Mercy

The Master of the Day of Judgment.

*It is You alone we worship, it is You alone we ask for help * Guide us on the Straight Path,*

*The Path of those upon whom you have given your bounties, * not the path of those who have earned Your anger, nor those who are misguided.*

(The Qur'ān, Chapter 1)

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ * الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

* مَالِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّينِ * إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ

نَسْتَعِينُ * اهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ

صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ * غَيْرِ

الْمَغْضُوبِ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا الضَّالِّينَ

- In exploring our theme this year of "Finding a Voice in Troubled Times," I plan to use Qur'ānic accounts of some histories that it documents and relate those events to what we see today in our contemporary troubling times. As the morals and lessons of these histories are centered on the Prophets—literally the speaking up of the Prophets—I've titled this sermon: "The Voice of the Prophets".
- Regarding our current troubling times, I'm not here to report the news, but I'm assuming you're paying attention to the changes taking place in our nation. If you are, then I rely on you to reflect the Qur'ānic examples on what you see.
- To lay a foundation, especially considering the current discriminatory rebranding of American patriotism, I find it's useful to convey what America means to me, as an American patriot, as a Muslim shaped by Qur'ānic study, pre- and post- Qur'ānic Islamic history and especially their civilizational influences on the modern European, and then American regions of the world. If you Google any of the keywords I just mentioned, you'll find the evidences for what I mean: Simply put, the civilization that the Western one inherited from was the Islamic Civilization. (I spoke a bit on this in 2022's sermon, it's on the website).
- So, what does America mean to me? When The Qur'ān came into existence on earth about 1400 years ago—about 600 years after Jesus—it put forth a vision that true belief and trust in God manifests itself in unequivocal justice, compassion and generosity. Simply put, if you trust in God then treat all people justly not tyrannically; safeguard the well-being of all not just your group; err on the side of kindness rather than hostility. With its promise of eternal life being based on behaviors instead of labels it made eternal salvation equally accessible to all. And so many peoples and cultures tried to adapt this for their earthly and heavenly success, from the Companions of Muhammad, to the rest of the Arabs, the Persians, the Africans, the Indians and South Asians, the Southeast Asians, the Central Asians, the Balkans and Northern Caucasus, the Chinese, the Turks, the Sicilians, and the Andalusian Spanish, who initiated the journey to the Western Hemisphere in 1492 and so many more peoples. When they abided by The Qur'ān's teachings of universal justice, they did well, when tribalism, ethno-centricity and racism took over, they didn't. And in their doing well they advanced thought in the world, into Europe and ultimately America.

- From the Crusaders' exposure to Eastern systems to their roles in the Magna Carta to the Muslim navigators who sailed with Columbus to the Jeffersonian Qur'an the influence was there. And the American experiment became the latest, biggest one on universal justice, compassion and generosity. We got it wrong with the indigenous peoples of America, indeed all indigenous peoples of the West, we got it wrong with African slavery, we got it wrong many times, but we got it right at times also, and we always tried to self-correct. We did well when we welcomed diversity, when more people became more free, when we opened our hearts, minds and doors to others, when we always stood as a haven for justice, for checks and balances, for immigrants and refugees like our ancestors were. But who we are in every generation changes, and every generation can change America for better or worse. So, where we stand today, we must weigh heavily the coming changes: Will we become like a bygone culture from history or will we remain the bold, righteous experiment in justice, kindness and generosity for that's what America means to me. What role will our voices have in this change?
- So, with this foundational backdrop, let's start with a Qur'ānic history of an unnamed people intending them to be a generally applicable construct.

God gives an example of a city that was safe, secure, and restful. Its sustenance was supplied abundantly from many places. But then they became unjust, ungrateful for the bounties God gave them, so God caused them to taste an all-encompassing hunger and fear because of what they used to unjustly fabricate.

And there had come to them a Messenger from among themselves but they denied him – refusing to listen and change – so suffering overwhelmed them while they continued to be unjust.

(The Qur'ān, Chapter 16, Verses 112-113)

وَضَرَبَ اللَّهُ مَثَلًا قَرْيَةً كَانَتْ آمِنَةً مُطْمَئِنَّةً
يَأْتِيهَا رِزْقُهَا رَغَدًا مِنْ كُلِّ مَكَانٍ فَكَفَرَتْ
بِأَنْعَمِ اللَّهِ فَأَذَاقَهَا اللَّهُ لِبَاسَ الْجُوعِ
وَالْخَوْفِ بِمَا كَانُوا يَصْنَعُونَ *
وَلَقَدْ جَاءَهُمْ رَسُولٌ مِنْهُمْ فَكَذَّبُوهُ
فَأَخَذَهُمُ الْعَذَابُ وَهُمْ ظَالِمُونَ

- Ponder this example and reflect it on us today. Their ungratefulness of God's blessings was their practice of injustice. The messenger was one of them, known to them, who spoke up amongst them, yet they denied him, and rejected whatever he voiced to save them from the impending doom. But he spoke up, nonetheless.
- Before moving on to three specific examples of named peoples and Prophets, I would like to share a Qur'ānic insight that is both foreboding and ironic.

A key process by which God gets things done

- Simply put, God causes the mechanism of his creation to do the work of His Decree, like Aristotle's concept of the Prime Mover. Simple evidence being God's mechanism for guiding humans came through other humans—Prophets—and the Word of God they spoke was scribed into written material by other humans, i.e. God doing this important thing through the mechanism of His creatures.
- There are those in our nation and world that act on inconsistent views concerning this. On one hand they say that God and His creation Nature are too powerful to be affected by mere human behavior so we can keep emitting and burning all we want, we will never negatively impact the climate. Regardless of the scientific data and evidence, they say, who are we to affect God's power?

- On the other hand, concerning Judgement, Resurrection and other scriptural end-of-world prophecies, they say we need to act to bring that about. The return of Jesus and the ensuing Kingdom of God will be by our hands, so we need to move our politics, our government, our international alliances to bring about this outcome. Indeed, these two inconsistent views are puzzling, on one hand ignore measurable data, and on the other act on behalf of God's Power.
- The irony is that Qur'ānically, the way it works is more the latter: God manifesting His Power and Decree through the mechanism of human action.

All forms of corruption and imbalances have occurred on the land and the seas because of what humans have done with their own hands. This is so that God shows them and causes them to taste the consequences of their actions before it is too late while they still have a chance to reverse course and return to doing good.

(The Qur'ān, Chapter 30, Verse 41)

ظَهَرَ الْفَسَادُ فِي الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ بِمَا
كَسَبَتْ أَيْدِي النَّاسِ لِيُذِيقَهُمْ بَعْضَ
الَّذِي عَمِلُوا لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْجِعُونَ

- So, with this insight in mind, I'll give three specific Qur'ānic histories, of how this plays out and the important role the God-guided active voice of the Prophets played in trying to avert their peoples from their unjust ways, seeking to return them from suffering to salvation, both earthly and eternal.
- All Prophetic stories in The Qur'ān are intended for us to have relatable human role models as we navigate this life towards our immortal life. Our hope is that we can reflect on these and strengthen our courage to speak and act appropriately as human agents of God's Will, if it be His Will, to save our nation and world.
- The first is Noah, the example is his persistence and determination although faced with near complete and constant rejection. Mentioned 43 times in The Qur'ān, I'll just focus on a section that communicates his ultimate frustration.

We sent Noah to his people saying to him: Warn your people before a terrible suffering comes to them ... {So, Noah did just that, for 950 years! With complete rejection, yet he persisted, saying} ... My Lord, I've been calling unto my people night and day. But my call has only caused them to run further away from You. Every time I call to them, that You may forgive them they put their fingers in their ears and cordon themselves off from me, growing more obstinate and arrogant in their false pride. I called upon them openly, publicly; and privately, one-on-one ... {his persistence, diversity of approaches, appeal should be role models to us; how much effort will we expend to save our nation and world? For we know how Noah's people ended} ... So, because of their persistent unjust crimes We drowned them with the flood and cause them to enter Hell and they found no one to help them against God. For Noah had prayed: My Lord: do not leave any one of the rejectors of truth on earth, if you leave them, they will misguide your righteous servants and give birth to nothing but wickedness and stubborn ingratitude.

(The Qur'ān, Chapter 71, Verses 1,5-9, 25-27, non-italic text not part of translation)

إِنَّا أَرْسَلْنَا نُوحًا إِلَىٰ قَوْمِهِ أَنْ أَنْذِرْ قَوْمَكَ
مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ يَأْتِيَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ ... قَالَ
رَبِّ إِنِّي دَعَوْتُ قَوْمِي لَيْلًا وَنَهَارًا * فَلَمْ
يَزِدْهُمْ دُعَائِي إِلَّا فِرَارًا * وَإِنِّي كُلَّمَا دَعَوْتُهُمْ
لِتُغْفِرَ لَهُمْ جَعَلُوا أُصَافِعَهُمْ فِي آذَانِهِمْ
وَاسْتَعْصَفُوا لِيُأْتِيَهم وَأَصْرُوا وَاسْتَكْبَرُوا
اسْتِكْبَارًا * ثُمَّ إِنِّي دَعَوْتُهُمْ جَهَرًا * ثُمَّ إِنِّي
أَعْلَنْتُ لَهُمْ وَأَسْرَرْتُ لَهُمْ إِسْرَارًا ...
بِمَا خَطِبْتَهُمْ أُعْزِفُوا فَأَذْخَلُوا نَارًا فَلَمْ يَجِدُوا
لَهُمْ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ أَنْصَارًا * وَقَالَ نُوحٌ رَبِّ
لَا تَذَرْ عَلَى الْأَرْضِ مِنَ الْكَافِرِينَ دَيَّارًا *
إِنَّكَ إِنْ تَذَرَهُمْ يُضِلُّوا عِبَادَكَ وَلَا يَلِدُوا إِلَّا
فَاجِرًا كَفَّارًا

- The last part is sobering, for in the concept of God's working His Decree through humans, you have the destruction of Noah's people being brought about by his voice in prayer, for as God's representative, he became convinced their injustice was irredeemable; and only the righteous were saved on the ark to continue humanity.
- The second history is that of a people likely not known to you. They're not mentioned in the Bible as they were an ancient Arab civilization. Archaeological evidence has verified their existence. Mentioned in The Qur'an 24 times. Their name is 'Ād, their appellation is Iram dhāt Al-'Imād meaning symbolized by extremely tall desert outpost – kinda like Pharaoh and his pyramids – You can use these words to Google them. They existed after Noah and before Abraham. The Prophet of God sent to them is named Hūd. Listen closely to their description and their sayings, and reflect deeply, comparing with the rhetoric you hear today.

'Ād denied all Messengers, [when they denied] their brother Hūd who was sent to them saying, will you not protect yourselves from what you fear by being just and obedient to God? I am a trustworthy Messenger sent to you so be conscious and fearful of God and follow me. I ask you for no reward as my reward is with the Lord of all Worlds. [Didn't God give you the ability] to build tall signposts on every high place just for amusement? And to make for yourselves mighty castles thinking they would make your earthly life and legacy immortal? And when you lay hands and attack anyone, you do so cruelly without any restraint, so [rather than this, instead] be conscious and fearful of God and follow me. Be conscious and fearful of The One Who has amply given you all that you know, has amply given you cattle, children, gardens and springs, I fear for you the impending suffering of a terrible day.

(The Qur'an, Chapter 26, Verses 123-135)

كَذَّبَتْ عَادُ الْمُرْسَلِينَ * إِذْ قَالَ لَهُمُ أَحُوهُمْ
هُودٌ أَلَا تَتَّقُونَ * إِنِّي لَكُمْ رَسُولٌ أَمِينٌ *
فَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُوا * وَمَا أَسْأَلُكُمْ عَلَيْهِ مِنْ
أَجْرٍ إِنْ أَجْرِيَ إِلَّا عَلَى رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ *
أَتُنْبِئُونَ بِكُلِّ رِيحٍ آيَةً تَعْبَثُونَ * وَتَتَّخِذُونَ
مَصَانِعَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَخْلُدُونَ * وَإِذَا بَطَشْتُمْ بَطَشْتُمْ
جَبَّارِينَ * فَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُوا * وَاتَّقُوا الَّذِي
أَمَدَّكُمْ بِمَا تَعْلَمُونَ * أَمَدَّكُمْ بِالنَّعَامِ وَبَنِيانٍ *
وَجَنَّاتٍ وَعُيُونٍ * إِنِّي أَخَافُ عَلَيْكُمْ عَذَابَ
يَوْمٍ عَظِيمٍ

- So Hūd's voice is one of reminding, encouraging his people to change their ways. In their response to him, they would say "we don't care about your warnings," "this is just made-up stuff," "we're never going to be punished," so God says:

So as for 'Ād they were exceedingly arrogant in the earth, against everything right and just, they would say: "Who can ever have power greater than ours?" [God says]: Didn't they realize that God, The One Who created them has power greater than theirs? Yet they continued to reject Our messages. So, We sent against them fierce, bitterly cold and clattering winds continuously for [seven nights and eight] days of total misfortune that they taste the suffering of humiliation in this life and the suffering of the Hereafter is even more humiliating and they will not be helped.

(The Qur'an, Chapter 41, Verses 15-16)

فَأَمَّا عَادُ فَاسْتَكْبَرُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ بِغَيْرِ الْحَقِّ
وَقَالُوا مَنْ أَشَدُّ مِنَّا قُوَّةً أَوَلَمْ يَرَوْا أَنَّ اللَّهَ
الَّذِي خَلَقَهُمْ هُوَ أَشَدُّ مِنْهُمْ قُوَّةً وَكَانُوا
بِآيَاتِنَا يَجْحَدُونَ * فَأَرْسَلْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ رِيحًا
صَرْصَرًا فِي أَيَّامٍ نَحْسَاتٍ لِنَدْرِقَهُمْ عَذَابَ
الْآخِرَةِ فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَلَعَذَابُ الْآخِرَةِ
أَحْزَى وَهُمْ لَا يُنصَرُونَ

- So, another arrogant, unjust people, rejecting the voice of their Prophet calling them to worldly and eternal salvation, but lost themselves in their arrogance.
- The final example we all know well: the history of Moses and Pharaoh. The Qur'ān covers this topic in over 158 places. It is the single, most comprehensive history in The Qur'ān with lessons that fill books. I'll only focus summarily on a few aspects pertaining to our troubled times as I spoke on this story in 2024.
- Moses and Pharaoh's story begins centuries earlier as an immigration story. The Prophet of God Joseph, son of Jacob, aka Israel, exiled by his brothers, ends up sold as a slave in Egypt. After many tribulations he becomes free and is elevated to the king's Minister of Agriculture because he foretells an impending famine and knows how to weather it. He sponsors his family and they take Egypt, an open, organized, civilized nation, as their new home as Joseph says to them:

You all enter Egypt, by God's Will, [being] secure, safe.

أَدْخُلُوا مِصْرَ إِن شَاءَ اللَّهُ آمِينَ

(The Qur'ān, Chapter 12, end of Verse 99)

- Of course, we know what happens in the next 2 to 4 centuries as Egypt's leaders changed. The Qur'ān summarizes:

Pharaoh rose in the land, proud, exultant and divided its people into different parties. He made one of them weak and oppressed by slaughtering their sons while keeping their women alive; he was indeed of those who made things evil, corrupt. So, We desired to favor the group that was weakened in the land: to make them leaders, to make them inheritors, to establish them in the land. And [equally important] to show Pharaoh, Hāmān and their troops [the futility of their unjust precautions and the coming true of] what they used to fear concerning [the people they oppressed].

إِنَّ فِرْعَوْنَ عَلَا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَجَعَلَ أَهْلَهَا شِيَعًا يَسْتَضَعِفُ طَائِفَةً مِنْهُمْ يُذَبِّحُ أَبْنَاءَهُمْ وَيَسْتَحْيِي نِسَاءَهُمْ إِنَّهُ كَانَ مِنَ الْمُفْسِدِينَ * وَنُرِيدُ أَنْ نَمُنَّ عَلَى الَّذِينَ اسْتُضِعُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَنَجْعَلَهُمْ أَئِمَّةً وَنَجْعَلُهم الْوَارِثِينَ * وَنُمَكِّنَ لَهُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَنُرِي فِرْعَوْنَ وَهَامَانَ وَجُنُودَهُمَا مِنْهُمْ مَا كَانُوا يَحْذَرُونَ

(The Qur'ān, Chapter 28, Verses 4-6)

- There is much in between, but we focus on the end: Moses & Aaron's voices in prayer:

[And in a quiet moment], Moses [with his brother] prayed to God: Our Lord, You have given Pharaoh and his administration splendor and wealth in this life, but Our Lord [they use it to] drive people away from Your Path [of Justice, Compassion and Freedom]. So, Our Lord, [we ask you] to wipe out their wealth and harden their hearts so that they will never believe until they see the painful suffering that waits for them. God replied: Your prayer has been accepted, so both of you continue doing the right things and do not follow the path of those who don't care to know [the real consequences of what they're doing].

وَقَالَ مُوسَى رَبَّنَا إِنَّكَ آتَيْتَ فِرْعَوْنَ وَمَلَئَهُ زِينَةً وَأَمْوَالًا فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا رَبَّنَا لِيُضِلُّوا عَنْ سَبِيلِكَ رَبَّنَا اطْمِسْ عَلَى أَمْوَالِهِمْ وَاشْدُدْ عَلَى قُلُوبِهِمْ فَلَا يُؤْمِنُوا حَتَّى يَرَوْا الْعَذَابَ الْأَلِيمَ * قَالَ قَدْ أُجِيبَتْ دَعْوَتُكُمَا فَاسْتَقِيمَا وَلَا تَتَّبِعَانِ سَبِيلَ الَّذِينَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

(The Qur'ān, Chapter 10, Verse 88-89)

- Like Noah, Moses and Aaron used their voice in prayer to end the injustice.
- In closing, reflect on these examples. Reflect on the common thread of arrogance and injustice. Reflect them on our country and world. Reflect them on ourselves, on what should we do with our voice: Will we stay silent when the unjust seeks to silence any critique, or will we trust that God may make them hear and bless us with prosperity and peace. If we stay silent, and cannot restore the righteous American

experiment, then is it possible that the end of these past peoples will be our end? They are all now bygone histories; nothing's left but their voices as lessons for us. Is that all we'll be for the future?

- Reflect on their demise: injustice → imbalance → response by nature/climate, floods, storms, earthquakes → the most obedient of God's creation → brings back balance (recall Covid and today). See ending prayer from Mark 13: 5-8.
- Reflect these examples also on today's Psalm 64 reading, ponder the contrivances we wrought against one another and their consequences.
- Furthermore, a predominance of unjust action both done by, and done against, centers upon Muslims and Middle Easterners of today where they are treated as alien strangers and enemies even after their 1400 years of multi-continental, multi-cultural history that I mentioned. Consider that if we compared America's 250 years to the documented post-Qur'ānic history of Islam, that's like a 15-year-old compared to a 75-year-old: One who has not begun yet to mature compared to one who has lived a full life.
- But even in our common scripture, the Old Testament reading includes these Middle Easterners in God's blessing and Abraham's legacy. A location of Paran is Mecca in Arabia; the well in the desert is still there while the New Testament reading recenters people's value away from being chosen, away from being only Abraham's legacy, to being valued by the fruits they bear. Maybe we can have a dialogue, and you can ask me questions about this and anything else you like.
- So, as we reflect and close, I know we will end the worship with the Lord's Prayer, so like last year I will end the sermon with another part of scripture as prayer, a closing voice for today: foreboding, explanatory, and hopeful.

And Jesus began to say to them, "See that no one leads you astray. Many will come in my name, saying, 'I am he!' and they will lead many astray. And when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. This must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. These are but the beginning of the birth pains." Amen. (Mark 13: 5-8, English Standard Version)

Today's Scriptural Readings - ESV

Psalm 64

1 Hear my voice, O God, in my complaint; preserve my life from dread of the enemy. 2 Hide me from the secret plots of the wicked, from the throng of evildoers, 3 who whet their tongues like swords, who aim bitter words like arrows, 4 shooting from ambush at the blameless, shooting at him suddenly and without fear. 5 They hold fast to their evil purpose; they talk of laying snares secretly, thinking, "Who can see them?" 6 They search out injustice, saying, "We have accomplished a diligent search." For the inward mind and heart of a man are deep. 7 But God shoots his arrow at them; they are wounded suddenly. 8 They are brought to ruin, with their own tongues turned against them; all who see them will wag their heads. 9 Then all mankind fears; they tell what God has brought about and ponder what he has done. 10 Let the righteous one rejoice in the Lord and take refuge in him! Let all the upright in heart exult!

OT: Genesis 21:9-21

9 But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, laughing. 10 So she said to Abraham, "Cast out this slave woman with her son, for the son of this slave woman shall not be heir with my son Isaac." 11 And the thing was very displeasing to Abraham on account of his son. 12 But God said to

Abraham, "Be not displeased because of the boy and because of your slave woman. Whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for through Isaac shall your offspring be named. 13 And I will make a nation of the son of the slave woman also, because he is your offspring." 14 So Abraham rose early in the morning and took bread and a skin of water and gave it to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, along with the child, and sent her away. And she departed and wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba. 15 When the water in the skin was gone, she put the child under one of the bushes. 16 Then she went and sat down opposite him a good way off, about the distance of a bowshot, for she said, "Let me not look on the death of the child." And as she sat opposite him, she lifted up her voice and wept. 17 And God heard the voice of the boy, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, "What troubles you, Hagar? Fear not, for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is. 18 Up! Lift up the boy, and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make him into a great nation." 19 Then God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water. And she went and filled the skin with water and gave the boy a drink. 20 And God was with the boy, and he grew up. He lived in the wilderness and became an expert with the bow. 21 He lived in the wilderness of Paran, and his mother took a wife for him from the land of Egypt.

NT: Matthew 3:1-10

1 In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, 2 "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." 3 For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.'" 4 Now John wore a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. 5 Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him, 6 and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. 7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8 Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. 9 And do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,' for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. 10 Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.