



## Synopsis of Friday Sermon

Ameer Mustapha Elturk



بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful.

### Synopsis of the Friday Sermon delivered by Ameer Mustapha Elturk on February 21, 2014

#### “Allah Honors Black People”

February is Black History Month in America. The history of the African people and their freedom from slavery is commemorated and remembered during this month. The well known human rights activist Malcom X met his fate in the same month 49 years ago. He was martyred on February 21, 1965.

Islam promotes absolute equality and fraternity among the human race regardless of one’s skin color or faith. The notion of equality and brotherhood is articulated in a very profound way in surat al-Hujurat, “*O mankind! We created you (all) from a male and a female and made you nations and tribes that you may know one another. Surely, the most honorable among you with Allah is the most righteous. Verily, Allah is all-knowing, all-aware*” (al-Hujurat, 49:13).

In 1776 Benjamin Franklin and John Adams among other founding fathers of America asked Thomas Jefferson to write the Declaration of Independence that defined America and what it stood for. After a few iterations and much deliberation, the released document opened up with, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness.”

Thirteen years later, in 1789, the French revolution was set in motion. Peasants and laborers revolted against the bourgeoisie class calling for the abolition of feudalism raising the slogan, “Liberty, Equality and Fraternity.”

As recent as 1945, the Preamble of the United Nations Charter opens up with these words, “Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.”

Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) reads, “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood...” Yes, you read that right, “a spirit of brotherhood.”

Article 2 reads, “Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status...”

Not long after the release of the UDHR document in 1948, blacks in America revolted against the inhumane treatment and rancid racism that knew no end in sight. The Civil Rights movement of the 1960’s reshaped the laws and policies in place. Despite these changes, and in spite of the pleasantries one finds in the Declaration of Independence and the UDHR, blacks are still discriminated against.

Twelve centuries before the French Revolution and the birth of the Declaration of Independence, Prophet Muhammad (SAW) not only preached the ideals of freedom, equality and fraternity, he (SAW) actually established these principles.

Islam not only recognizes different people and languages but declared that all people regardless of their origin, skin color, ethnic background, faith, and gender belong to one family, the family of Adam (AS). All mankind are in essence, "*Banu Adam*" belonging to the first couple, Adam and Eve. Therefore, by birth, all people are equal before the Creator, Allah (SWT). "*O mankind! We created you (all) from a male and a female*" (*al-Hujurat, 49:13*).

Naturally, it was Allah (SWT)'s will and decision to create people with different colors and nations. The fact that the ayah begins with "O mankind," and not "O believers," tells us that Allah (SWT) does not discriminate between his servants by skin color or what region of the world they belong to, or for that matter what they believe in.

"*And indeed We have honored the children of Adam*" (*al-Isra', 17:70*). With this ayah, Muslims acknowledge the honor Allah (SWT) bestowed upon Luqman before the dawn of Islam, the status of Bilal, the Prophet's caller to prayer, and Allah (SWT)'s favor conferred upon Malcolm X centuries after the birth of Islam among many others. All of them, Luqman, Bilal and Malcolm X, were blacks of African descent.

Bilal Ibn Rabah (RAA) was owned by Ummayah Ibn Khalaf and was among the first to pledge his faith to the Prophet (S) as a Muslim. His faith in Allah (SWT) was undeniably unshakable. Bilal (RAA) did not relinquish his faith despite being brutally persecuted. He insisted on repeating *Ahadun Ahad*, One, One. During the conquest of Mecca when the Prophet (SAW) returned to Mecca triumphant, he (SAW) was accompanied by Bilal (RAA) as they entered the Ka'bah and removed the idols and images displayed while repeating *Allahu Akbar*. The Prophet (SAW) then ordered Bilal to climb to the top of the Ka'bah and call the 'Athan.

Abu Dharr (RAA) was remembered for his strict piety. The Prophet (SAW) once said, "He who likes to look at the piety (asceticism) of Jesus the son of Mary, look at Abu Dharr." Abu Dharr once slipped and called Bilal, "O son of a black woman." Bilal complained to the Prophet and he (SAW) became angry. Not knowing that Bilal had complained to the Prophet (SAW), Abu Dharr came to him and the Prophet turned away from him. Abu Dharr asked, "O messenger of Allah, have you turned away because of something you have been told?" The Prophet replied, "Have you reproached Bilal about his mother? By the One who revealed the Book to Muhammad none is more virtuous over another except in righteous deeds. You have none but an insignificant amount."

One slip almost made all of Abu Dharr's pious acts disappear. We must watch what we say and always be mindful of people's feelings and sensitivities to racial among other slurs that might be offensive. The status of Bilal, the Ethiopian, among the companions was very high and equal to Abu Bakr's status. He occupied a distinguished position among the companions of the Prophet (SAW). Omar (RAA) would often say, "Abu Bakr is our master and he freed our master." Bilal would humbly reply, "I am only a man who used to be a slave." His memory is still with us today whenever we hear the call to prayer. Bilal (RAA) was honored by Allah (SWT).

Luqman the wise, a well-known sage mentioned by pre-Islamic poets, was also honored by Allah (SWT) at a time when slavery was the norm. An entire surah in the Quran is dedicated to Luqman. Ibn Abbass (RAA) describes him as an Ethiopian slave who worked as a carpenter. Other sahaba claimed that he was short with a flat nose and thick lips, and Allah (SWT) granted him wisdom but not prophethood. "*And indeed, We bestowed upon Luqman wisdom: 'Be grateful to Allah'*" (*Luqman, 31:12*).

Luqman was consulted by many people for advice. His golden advice to his son was, “*O my son! Do not join others in worship with Allah, verily; joining others in worship with Allah is a great injustice (Zulm)*” (Luqman, 31:13). He would counsel his son saying, “My son! Sit with the learned men and keep close to them. Allah gives life to the hearts with the light of wisdom as Allah gives life to the dead earth with the abundant rain of the sky.” Luqman was given abundant good. “(Allah) gives wisdom to whomever He will. And whoever is given wisdom has indeed been given abundant good. But only those with insight bear this in mind” (al-Baqarah, 2:269). The etched legacy of Luqman in the Qur’an will continue to be remembered and celebrated until the end of time.

From the distant past to merely decades ago, a man from African descent by the name of Malcolm X was also honored by Allah (SWT). Malcolm was himself once racist against whites. He was taught that white men were evil – this was in retaliation to the centuries of humiliation blacks suffered from the institution of slavery that reduced a slave to 3/5<sup>th</sup> of a man.

When Malcolm embarked on the pilgrimage to Makkah, his feelings changed as this spiritual journey changed his outlook and ultimately, his life. He saw with his eyes and felt with his heart the true meaning of equality and brotherhood. When he returned from this life altering experience, Malcolm said, “I met blonde-haired, blue-eyed men I could call my brothers.” The worldview, white men are evil, quickly changed and he had a message for all races. He became a well-known human rights activist and promoted equality and challenged the government’s racist stance. Allah (SWT) honored Malcolm X with martyrdom when he was assassinated on February 21, 1965 in New York City during the height of the Civil Rights movement.

In 1975 Imam Warithuddin Muhammad (RA), the son of Malcolm’s mentor from the Nation of Islam, Elijah Muhammad, broke away and took with him a multitude of members from his father’s organization to form his movement that embraced mainstream orthodox Islam. We as Americans are all indebted to Malcolm X and Imam Warithuddin Muhammad as they helped influence and shape Islam in America.

Those who fought for equality during the Civil Rights movement of the sixties led by the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. may have been victorious in achieving their objective of equality as a matter of law. In reality however, the fight for true equality is far from over. Black people are still discriminated against. Not long ago, I was informed by a member of our congregation who happened to be black and live in the city of Warren where our Islamic Center is located that, the Warren police refused to document incidents of discrimination against him.

Sadly, our community is not immune from this type of discrimination. The gap between the indigenous African American population and immigrant Muslims and their offspring needs to be closed. Imam Luqman (RA) of Masjid al-Haq in Detroit, shortly before he was killed, cried out to the affluent immigrant Muslims inviting their attention to helping and supporting the down trodden, deprived and disadvantaged brothers and sisters in Detroit rather than donating huge sums of money to Republican and Democratic politicians. His cries fell on deaf ears.

He was entrapped by the FBI to purchase stolen merchandise. At the site where the exchange of goods was to take place, Imam Luqman met his fate. He didn’t need to resort to stolen merchandise to care for his community. It makes one wonder, are we living our faith? We preach equality, fraternity and brotherhood. Are we practicing what we preach? Only Allah (SWT) knows what would have been the outcome had the affluent Muslims in the suburbs paid enough attention to Imam Luqman’s cries and community needs.

Another sad reality impeding our community is the use of abhorrent racial slurs. Sadly, racial slurs and name calling such as using the word *abd* (pl. *abeed*), *akata*, *adoon*, *jareer* and/or *kallu*, are different words in Arabic and other languages that mean slave(s) or Negro. We must refrain from using these and other derogatory and offensive terms and be sensitive to the feelings of others.

The challenge that lies ahead is tearing down the wall of discrimination against blacks and other races that separate and divide us. Muslims of all races and colors should be completely integrated to exhibit the true hue of Islamic brotherhood. Interracial marriages should be welcomed. Integration among the diverse Muslim community as we promote Islam in America is a *must*.

Despite the prejudice, bigotry and discrimination that existed for decades in Arabia, Muslims came together whether they were white, black, Arab or non-Arab. Whether it was Suhaib al-Rumi, Bilal ibn Rabbah, Abu Bakr or Salman al-Farisi, they were all considered equal before the law under Islam and became real brothers in faith. Islam didn't just introduce and teach a concept, this revolutionary societal shift was practiced and established – a custom that has sadly escaped our community.

The Prophet (SAW) in his farewell sermon sums it up as he says, “O people, your Lord is One and your father is One. An Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab nor a non-Arab has any superiority over an Arab; also a white has no superiority over a black nor does a black have any superiority over white except by piety and good action. All mankind is from Adam and Eve, and Adam from dust.” Let us come together as a community and truly work on eradicating divides between race and ethnicity as a single nation of brothers and sisters in Islam.