

## **Crusades or Missions?**

This lesson is entitled “God Wills it: Crusades or Missions?” I will begin with a prayer, although not one from a crusader, but from a man who lived in the time that those events were taking place. That man’s name was Richard of Chichester, which is in England. This is a very wonderful prayer that you might know, but you might not know that it came from Richard Chichester. Let us pray.

*“Thanks be to Thee, my Lord Jesus Christ, for all the benefits which Thou hast given to me, for all the pains and insults which Thou hast borne for me. O most merciful Redeemer, friend, and brother, may I know Thee more clearly, love Thee more dearly, and follow Thee more nearly, day by day. Amen.”*

If there is one lesson in this course that I would like to leave out it would be this one. I would at least like to leave out the first part of this lesson, because it is embarrassing. It is hurtful for me to have to talk about the crusades. There is not much good that I can say about that event in church history. It is part of the record, however, and it is something we need to know about. These things took place in the name of the Lord. Perhaps they were not done by true Christians, but they were done in the name of the Lord, with the sign of the cross. The crusades were a disastrous period. People went forth into battle not realizing that Jesus Christ is the Prince of Peace and not the leader of a battle. There are times when we encounter something like this in church history and our only response can be to study and to forgive. There is not much that we can celebrate, although the second half of this lesson will have brighter moments.

Before beginning to describe the crusades, I will offer a brief review of the interaction of Christianity and Islam. In the year 622 was the flight of Muhammad, so we can use 622 as the beginning of the period of Islam. It was not too many years later, in 638, when Jerusalem, the holy city of the Christians, was conquered by the Muslims. Then the Muslims spread quickly across North Africa, into Spain, and all the way up into France. There they were turned back at the Battle of Tours in 732. For centuries after that, Islam also threatened the great eastern Roman capital, Constantinople. In the eleventh century the end of that great city appeared to be approaching.

That was the context of the crusades. The crusades were really an attempt to do something about Islam. There were seven crusades. If you count the children’s Crusade, then there were eight. It all began in 1095 when Pope Urban II began to preach the First Crusade. He called upon Christian people in the West to leave their homes and to make the long journey to Jerusalem to fight against the Muslims and to free that city from their control. Somehow it became a popular notion. As Urban made his appeal the people began to respond by saying, “*Deus vult*,” which means, “God wills it.” Soon that cry went out across Europe. It was not only professional soldiers, but also regular people who began to prepare for the crusades. There was almost a mass migration of those people from Europe, making the long walk to Constantinople and then on to Jerusalem.

For 200 years there was crusading activity. That time can be divided into three parts. First was the attack of the Franks. The early leaders of the crusades were the Franks. That first 50-year period, in terms of military accomplishment, was the most successful. It was really the only successful time in the period of the crusades. Those early crusaders did capture Jerusalem, and they set up some Latin kingdoms there. That was much to the dismay of the Eastern Byzantine emperor, who wanted any captured lands to be added to his empire. The crusaders were from the West, however, and they were not going to give the Eastern emperor what they had won. So for about 50 years there was some small success accomplished by the crusaders. Then Islam produced a great military leader named Saladin. For the next 50 years

everything was the reverse of the first 50 years. The Muslims re-conquered the territory they had lost. They defeated every crusading army they fought. Then for the next 100 years a downward spiraling occurred. The people of Europe tried to recover some of the early enthusiasm for the crusades. They launched other crusades that hoped to accomplish what they had failed to do in the first 100 years. The second 100 years, however, were even less successful than the first 100 years. The last crusade was led by Louis IX of France, the man who is known as Saint Louis; the city in which Covenant Seminary is located is named after him. Saint Louis was killed in an attack on Tunis in 1270, and that was essentially the end of the crusading period.

Why did people do this? Why were Western Christians so intrigued and inspired by the idea of the crusades? First was the concern to honor Christ. It was a very mistaken idea, but the idea was that Christ had been insulted by the Muslims. So the thought was that any real Christian would take up His cause and fight for His honor. That was the appeal that the saintly Bernard of Clairvaux made when preaching the Second Crusade in 1147. It might surprise you that Bernard of Clairvaux was the preacher of a crusade. Bernard wrote the wonderful book, *On Loving God*, but he was also concerned that Christians go on a crusade. Bernard said, "Our King Jesus is accused of treachery. It is said of Him by the Muslims that He is not God, but that He falsely pretended to be something He was not. Any man among you who is His vassal ought to rise up to defend his Lord from the infamous accusation of treachery. He should go to the sure fight, where to win will be glorious and where to die will be gain." With that kind of preaching coming from people like Bernard of Clairvaux, saying the honor of Christ was at stake, there were many people who responded to that. They joined in the crusading movement.

Another motive was the recovery of the Holy Land. It was important for Catholic Christians at that time to make pilgrimages. They went on pilgrimages to sacred sites, particularly Jerusalem. For many years preceding the First Crusade, it was not possible to do that. In the early period after the Muslims had conquered Jerusalem, they did allow pilgrims to make those journeys to the sacred sites of Christianity. From 1079, however, they cut off that access to Jerusalem, and they ambushed Christian pilgrims en route. Thus one concern for Christians was to recapture Jerusalem and make it possible for Christians to again visit the Holy Land. They were not merely tourists, because a visit to the Holy Land had great significance to one's spiritual status.

Another motive was to try to reunite the two halves of Christianity. The Eastern church broke with the Western church in 1054. The idea for crusades began when Alexius, the emperor in the East, sent a letter to the pope in Rome asking for some help against the Muslims who were approaching his great city. The pope responded by preaching the First Crusade. Alexius got more than he bargained for. He thought he would receive a few hundred well-trained soldiers whom he could have at his disposal to help his army against the Muslims. What arrived, however, was a huge ragtag company of people, most of whom were not soldiers. Alexius did not know what to do about this group that he viewed as a new barbarian invasion from Europe who had arrived on the doorstep of his capital. The relationship between the East and West grew worse during the crusades. If the crusaders could not find Muslims to fight, then they settled for Eastern Orthodox Christians. In 1204 the crusaders attacked and sacked the city of Constantinople, which was a greater city than all the cities of Europe. It was also a city of great ecclesiastical treasures. Most of those were taken to Venice. If you go to Venice today you will see many great treasures that were originally in Constantinople. So instead of helping reunite those two branches of Christianity, the crusades actually made the situation far worse.

There was also the matter of personal salvation involved as a motive for the crusades. The popes used every means to motivate people that they could. Pope Urban said at the beginning, "The sins of those that set out thither, if they lose their lives shall be remitted in that hour." So sinners saw an opportunity

to go fight the Muslims, and if they died, then automatically and immediately all their sins were forgiven. That was a tempting offer. Many people who believed they did not have a good chance in Europe, because their sins were many, were willing to leave and take the risk. Some perhaps even looked forward to being killed in battle and going straight to heaven.

Mixed in among all those motives were ambition, a desire for adventure, and an opportunity to do something different. The popes made no secret of the fact that European Christians were spending too much time fighting one another in that hectic feudal period of European life. The idea was that it was far better for them to refrain from fighting one another and instead go fight the Turks and the Muslims. They could deflect some of their military energy in that direction. There are some great figures, romantic figures, in that history. The Third Crusade, for instance, had Richard I of England, called the “lionhearted,” and King Philip Augustus of France and Emperor Frederick Barbarossa, who were all romantic figures of history. Nothing resulted from that crusade. The emperor drowned and Richard and Philip spent most of their time fighting each other.

One of the most curious events of that history is what is called the Children’s Crusade. That took place in 1212. Perhaps as many as 30,000 children were involved. They may have been teenagers. It is not certain what their ages were. A crusading spirit gripped all of Europe with such fervor that thousands of young people decided they would go on a crusade. There were different branches of that crusade. The first left from France, and another left from Germany. The children felt that their elders had failed and that they could succeed. They went without arms. It was not an armed crusade. It was simply a large company of young people who believed that God was in it all. They had heard various prophecies, and they set out to go to North Africa or the various lands around Jerusalem. It is not known what their motive or goal was. Perhaps they intended to convert the Muslims. It may be that they did not know themselves. They did not even know how they were going to get there. They went as far as Marseille, and then they found a large sea before them. They could not walk any further, but that did not disturb them. They believed that if God had made a dry path for Moses and the children of Israel, then He could certainly do it again for them. They waited for a while, but nothing happened in the Mediterranean. Some of them went home at that point. Others got on ships. There were seven ships who claimed to be willing to take them where they wanted to go. Two of the ships were lost at sea. The other ships met some Muslim ships in the Mediterranean and then transferred all the children to the Muslim ships so they could be sold as slaves to the Muslims. There were several episodes of that Children’s Crusade, but they all ended the same way.

You might wonder whether anybody objected to the crusades at the time that they were occurring. Some people did object. We do not know what the objections were precisely. Our best evidence is the answers of churchmen to those who objected to the crusades. There were some who objected.

The crusades fell far short of achieving their goal. There was a brief success in the First Crusade. Even the small Latin kingdoms that were set up in the Holy Land were soon lost. Some new monastic orders were established in the Catholic Church, such as the Knights of the Temple, the Teutonic Knights, and the Knights of Saint John. Those were military orders. For the first time there were orders established that had the usual marks of poverty, obedience, and chastity, but they also added military service. They were crusading orders.

The real result of the crusades was a long legacy of bitterness. There was bitterness on the part of Jews, Eastern Orthodox Christians, and Muslims. Quite often the crusaders would attack Jews along their way. They would sometimes wipe out whole communities of Jews in Europe. The crusaders believed they were going to the Holy Land to liberate it from the Muslims. Somehow they also had the idea that the

Jews, who were closer to them, were responsible for the death of Christ anyway, so they thought it would be proper to eliminate them as well on their way to the Holy Land.

The crusaders had little intention of converting the Muslims, even by force. The idea was to defeat the Muslims, and generally to kill them, but not to convert them to Christianity. There were a few people, however, who were thinking that the Lord sends us out to the world not to kill people but to love them and bring the message of Christ's redemption to them. In the second part of this lesson, I will talk about missions during the time of the crusades.

One example of a person who took a very different approach to the Muslims was the poor little man of Italy, Francis of Assisi. Francis not only wandered about Italy preaching to the animals and helping the poor and taking care of lepers, but he also made a journey to Egypt. It was his own personal mission. He was able to meet Sultan al-Kamil. It is amazing that he was able to simply wander in and have an audience with the sultan. Francis was guileless and had no weapons, and he looked very insignificant. The Muslims may have thought he was slightly insane. Some of them had the idea that God speaks through people like that. When he got there, he said, "I am not sent of man, but of God, to show you the way of salvation." He had many conversations with the sultan and with other Muslims there. They were not converted to Christianity, but they were converted to Saint Francis. They liked him. He preached to them, taught them, and expressed love to them. Sam Moffett said in his book, *A History of Christianity in Asia*, that "a model of innocent faith, unarmed witness, and a complete willingness to die for his Lord inspired the members of his order in the same century and with the same utter disregard of their own safety to become the first Europeans to preach to the Mongols and the Chinese." So with Saint Francis and the Franciscans was the beginning of a missions movement, not only to the Muslims, but also to other lands.

The greatest of the missionaries of this period, and one of the greatest missionaries to Islam in all of history, was a man named Raymund Lull. It is important for us to know about him. He was born in Spain, on the island of Mallorca, which is a tourist island today. Like Francis, he was a worldly young man. He had much ambition, and he was showy in dress and in life. He wrote love poetry to various women. He enjoyed himself greatly. When he was converted he dedicated himself to one single goal for the rest of his life. As he grew up on Majorca, and living in Spain, the Muslims were still there. He was in a Muslim context. Later the Muslims were driven out of Spain, but that did not happen until the sixteenth century. Raymund Lull decided that God was calling him to be a missionary to the Muslims. He was going to proclaim in the very home of Islam, in the speech of the people, the Gospel of Christ. He wanted to go somewhere into a Muslim area, probably in North Africa, and he wanted to be able to speak to them in Arabic and preach the Gospel. It took him nine years to learn Arabic. He said it was an awful sounding language that sounded like the grunts and groans of beasts. Yet he worked hard at it. Not only did he learn Arabic, but he also wrote some books in Arabic. One book that he wrote in Arabic was his own spiritual biography. He also traveled through Europe, talking to popes and whoever would listen to him about his vision for missions to the Muslims. He started missionary colleges, where people could study languages, apologetics, and how to preach in a Muslim setting.

Three times in his life he ventured down into Muslim countries. The first two times he barely escaped with his life, and the last time he did not escape. As an old man of 85 he was stoned to death in modern-day Tunisia as he attempted to preach to the Muslims. Lull did not lack boldness. He would simply arrive, stand up and denounce Islam, and preach Christ to whoever would listen to him. And he did not lack brilliance. He was a wonderful scholar who wrote some intriguing books, which no one since that time has been able to fully understand. He wrote other books, too, in which he set things forth more clearly. As a man of boldness, brilliance, and scholarship, he would have benefited from adding tact. We

can admire him as a person who knew what had to be done. Raymund Lull said that if God would convert the Muslims, then it would be very easy for Him to convert the rest of the world. He realized that the Muslims were a very resistant people. It would take a great miracle of God to convert them. Not much has changed since the day of Lull. Among his many books, he wrote on scholastic theology, mystic religion, allegory, apologetics, and polemics. He tried to devise ways that Christianity could be presented, argued, and defended in the Muslim world. One book of verse that he wrote was called *The Hundred Names of God*. In the preface to that book, Lull says that in the Qur'an it says that there are 99 names of God and that he who knows the hundredth name will know all things. I have not been able to read this book, but I imagine that the hundredth name is the name of Christ. Lull died as an old man preaching the Gospel.

One writer has said, without too much exaggeration, that over the next 500 years no human voice proclaimed Christ publicly to the Muslims. The silence was not broken until the saintly Henry Martin stepped on Arabian soil in 1811. I talk about Henry Martin in the Reformation and Modern Church History course. I expect that Raymund Lull is rejoicing in heaven if he knows that Christians are becoming more aware of the Muslim world and sending more missionaries to that world. One book called *God Has Chosen Me for Everlasting Life* contains the testimonies of a number of converts from Islam to Christianity. One of those converts, an Indonesian man, testified that he took his initial step toward faith in Jesus Christ when he began to pray and ponder a verse he read in the Qur'an. That verse was, "Say, O people of the book," that is an expression referring to Jews and Christians, "You will be nothing unless you uphold the Torah and the Gospel and all that is revealed to you from your Lord." It is too bad the crusaders did not hear that verse from the Qur'an. "You will be nothing unless you uphold the Gospel." That Indonesian man became interested in the Gospel, and he wanted to find out what it was that Christians should believe and uphold. The basic ingredients in the accounts of the various converts to Islam were three things. One was the Scripture. They finally read the Bible. The second is almost always a very good friend who is a Christian. That friend must stay with the person throughout the experience. The third ingredient is biblical teaching about sin, grace, and salvation.

"The grass withers, the flower fades, but the Word of our God will stand forever" (Isaiah 40:8).

As we wonder about the motives of the crusaders, there were probably some individuals who were motivated out of true sincerity. At that time, what the church, bishop, or pope said was the word of God. So there were very sincere people who believed they were hearing the voice of God in the calls for the crusades. There was also much superstition that was common at the time. There was a story about an inspired goose that people believed God communicated with, and people believed that goose would lead the crusades. For a few miles they followed the goose, but it did not work out too well in the end. There was much superstition and much sinfulness. Yet there were surely some people with high ideals who genuinely believed that God wanted them to recover some very precious things for the church that they believed were in the hands of the "infidel," which is the term that was often used of the Muslims.

Some people wonder about the formation of the nation of Israel in the land of Palestine in the twentieth century and how that relates to the crusades. I believe there is one analogy that can be made. Israel claims that it was their land originally. They were not taking somebody else's land, but rather they were taking back land that somebody else had taken from them. The crusaders felt the same way. They did not see the Holy Land as Muslim land but as Christian land. It never really was Christian land, however, it was Jewish land. Yet it is a separate issue to argue that it was wrong for Israel to return to their land because we think it would have been wrong for the crusaders to take back the Holy Land from the Muslims.

Whatever we think about that issue, it is not legitimate for Christians to say to the Muslims, “You started it all.” We can make a case that the Muslims were rather ruthless. They did wipe out many Christian churches, although some of that has been exaggerated. The idea that Muslims forced Christians to convert has been exaggerated. Many of the Christian settlements in North Africa and the Middle East were already disillusioned with both Rome and Constantinople, and they welcomed Muslim control. They wanted to be free from those other Christians. With the complexity of that history, we cannot say to Muslims, “You started it.” We ought to say, “We are sorry.” There is no way we can defend the crusades, and we ought to be sorry that it was done in the name of Christ because it does not reflect Christ and His Spirit and His Gospel.