St. George in the Dock: Assessing the Crusades

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[0:00] Well, good morning. Wonderful to be here again. As Harvey said, my name is Roger Revell. Revell makes it sound more auspicious than it actually is. Revell is how it's pronounced in the south. Maybe it was Revell way back when the Normans invaded England or something.

Back in the period of time which we're going to be looking at today. Just want to give you a heads up, we're going to be keeping a brisk pace this morning. We've got some ground to cover and as you know, I've got to zip out just around 10 or shortly after to get to St. Peter's for the service down there.
Well, let's start with a prayer. Well, we thank you for the legacy of the gospel and the work of the Spirit in all sorts of human cultures.
We call this church history. It's got lots that's instructive for us. Both things that we should do and emulate and things that we should not do and not replicate. And so we pray that you give us the sermon as we sift through the material today.
Give us a clear understanding of things, sober judgment. And Lord, may we find good things for our own spirituality as we reflect critically this morning.
[1:07] Amen. So last winter, as some of you will remember, I was here and I spoke about the Crusades. We took a little time to explore the Crusades. In that session, we gave our attention briefly and selectively to the chronology and general history of the Crusading events.

And what we had in mind specifically were the five Crusades that were oriented towards Jerusalem and the Holy Land. For those of you who know a bit more about wider Crusading history, you'll realize that there were other Crusades that took place in Europe with Christians ransacking other Christians.
But the focus of this talk is the Crusades to the Holy Lands. And these campaigns, as some of you may remember, took place respectively in 1095, 1099.
The second was in 1147. The third in 1189. The fourth in 1202. And the fifth in 1213. Now, the brief historical mapping that I provided was followed by a little inquest into the theological rationale for Crusading.
And in that discussion, I drew our attention to a series of primary texts from the period that invited us to understand the Church's attitude and mindset with regard to Crusading.
[2:21] And so we dipped into some of the work of Pope Urban II, who called the First Crusade. We did a selective survey of the writings of Gilbert of Nogent. And we also looked at some of the sermons of Bernard of Clairvaux, for example, who was a great preacher of Crusading.

And in all of that, we hopefully gained some familiarity with why Crusading was deemed, by and large, in that context, as a permissible and fitting activity for the Christian.
We learned, for example, in this, that the cross in the hands of the Crusaders became, quote, a sign of obedience through the physical sacrifice of martial combat and an icon of military victory through faith.
We also discovered that Crusading was dignified by the Church as a holy vocation. In other words, Crusading made it possible for laypeople to undertake work that was recognized to be as pleasing to God as the work of being a monk or a priest.
We saw that Crusading plugged into the medieval penitential system. It was a form of pilgrimage, as it were, and a means therein to make amends for one's sin. And lastly, we acknowledged the link between Crusading and the broader cultural norms of Northern Europe at that time.
[3:34] These were norms of militarism and violence linked to Europe's anterior pagan cultures, the cultures that was there before the Christian missionary movements into that part of the world. And in light of that, we recognized that Crusading provided a spiritually acceptable or more

spiritually acceptable form of military engagement.

So, through the spirit of Crusading, to quote one scholar, the warrior ethic of Europe got Christianized, but the Church also got militarized. Now, keeping all of this in mind, today we're going to revisit the medieval Christian Crusading movement.
And our aim is to move from description and understanding, which was kind of the focus of the first talk, to evaluation, interpretation. So, how are we going to interpret and judge the Crusades? That's the concern of today's hour. And in speaking into these questions, I have two simple aims.
Aim number one is to bring some further historical clarification on the inauguration of the Crusades. And here, with an eye to the historical circumstances in the background of the Crusades, I want to suggest that they are not, as has been often argued of late, they are not in the first place the result of raw aggression and proto-imperialism.
[4:46] If you go Google around, you'll find a lot of people there saying this these days. Moreover, the Crusades are not an incident. They are not an incident whereby northern European Christians, Latin Christians, assaulted and disrupted an otherwise peaceful and enlightened and congenial Muslim set of Muslim cultures, Muslim Arabic cultures.

More accurately, the Crusades at their inauguration are responsive and defensive. They pushed back forces that can rightly be called expansionist and brutal. I'm going to demonstrate this for you shortly.
This is all what comes clear when we look at the Crusades and evaluate them in light of prior events, the prior history to the Crusades. And then aim number two, which will stand alongside this first aim as a bit of an antithesis, is to proffer a theological critique of crusading.
Here I want to make some theological judgments on the theological motivations that were at play in medieval crusading to the Holy Land. And so what I want to do here is take issue. I want to take issue.
So while historical argumentation and a purely historical interpretation, a worldly point of view you might say, can grant a certain legitimacy to crusading, when we judge the Crusades in light of the teaching of Scripture and what it says about Christian life and Christian spirituality, we inevitably have to call the whole enterprise into question.
[6:07] And so that's where we're going to land today. We're going to land on that task. Got it? Okay, so let's start with the historical clarification of the Crusadings. We want to do some myth dispelling, dispel some misunderstanding and some misleading information that is very much extant right now.

Let me begin with a statement here. Quote, The Crusades were not unprovoked. They were not the first round of European colonialism. They were not conducted for land, loot, or converts. The Crusaders were not barbarians who victimized, cultivated Muslims.
Now many of us are familiar with the sentiment that present Muslim Arabic bitterness towards the so-called Christian West dates back to the Crusades.
You hear that a lot today. Some of the present problems go all the way back to the Crusades. And that accounts that the Crusades were, quote, the first extremely bloody chapter in a long history, now 700 or 800 years history, of the first brutal European colonialism.
The Crusades were, in this point of view, quote, a terrible crime of Occidental greed and expansionism. And that type of rhetoric and that type of explanation has been around prior to the last 20 years in the midst of the war on terror and everything else that's going on.
[7:22] In 1999, the New York Times solemnly proposed that the Crusades were comparable to Hitler's atrocities or to the ethnic cleansing of Kosovo. Note well, such ill-advised judgments are hardly an anomaly in the New York Times.

Adding to such sentiments, people like Karen Armstrong, you may have heard of her as sort of a pseudo-public intellectual. She's definitely public. She's pseudo-intellectual, excuse me.
Karen Armstrong, popular-level writer on lots of religious themes, sees the Crusades as betraying an inherent Christian leaning towards violence. She says they warrant contrition and apology.
Armstrong has elsewhere asserted that the Crusades were, quote, our first colonies.
That's what Armstrong is asserting. In other words, the Latin Christians, the knights, they came, they saw, they conquered. The victims, the Arab Muslims in those parts, were enlightened, peaceful Muslim people living in the Middle East.

These types of attitudes towards the Crusades, this type of interpretation, it has a somewhat impressive pedigree in the realm of modernity. You can find this type of thinking in the thought of Voltaire, Hume, Diderot, and most notably in the historian Edward Gibbon at Oxford, who wrote The Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire.
[8:36] These folks and others suggested that the true motivation of medieval crusaders was, quote, the pursuit of mines of treasures, gold and diamonds, spices, and palaces of marble and jasper.

That's Edward Gibbon. Following Gibbon, such an illustrious fellow, many other historians have depicted the Crusades as a means for Latin Christians to solve material problems, to pursue wealth.
They were preoccupied with expanded markets rather than expanded faith. Now, the accrued summary of these historical interpretations of the Crusades can be put as follows, quote, During the Crusades of the Holy Land, expansionistic, imperialistic, Christendom brutalized, looted, and colonized a tolerant and peaceful Islam, to quote one contemporary critic.
Not so. Let me demonstrate. In support of my counterthesis here, I want to make four, about four instructive, I think, historical observations which are going to function to challenge the narrative of the Crusades that I've just represented to you.
A narrative that has become very common and is often uncritically accepted. So let's do our homework and critique the prejudice. Argument in the first. The Crusades were precipitated by Islamic provocation.
[10:00] Okay? So this is the first point in refuting the narrative that I've just outlined. This point is that the Crusades were precipitated by Islamic provocation. Specifically, they were precipitated by centuries, centuries, of bloody attempts to colonize the Latin West by expansionistic Islamic forces.

This came to a head in the 11th century when crusading itself to the Holy Land was galvanized by sudden Muslim attacks on Christian pilgrims visiting the Holy Land.
In responding to those threats, Christian crusaders set out, and they did not set out to convert Muslims or to take lots of Muslim territory. Rather, they were laboring to rout a real and present threat.
The threat began long before the 11th century. It, in fact, goes back to the 7th century. In that time, Islamic armies began to sweep over large portions of what was then Christian territory.
Right? Sicily, Corsica, Cyprus, Rhodes, Crete, Malta, Sardinia. Right? Islamic forces came in and took all that territory. This expansionist movement, to quote one historian, is actually directly tied to Muhammad's last word to his followers, which are this.
[11:11] Quote, I was ordered to fight all men until they say, there is no God but Allah. In this spirit, the prophet's heirs set out to, quote, conquer the world.

Now, Muhammad was born in 570 A.D. And when he was born, Christendom stretched from the Middle East all along North Africa, and it included much of Europe. As you know, within 80 years of his death, and he died in 632 A.D., North Africa, most of the Middle East, Cyprus, and most of Spain were Islamic.
Within 80 years of his death. Within another century, Sicily and southern Italy were added to that list. So, what happened to all the Christians and Jews who had been living there? Right?
Right? How did this Muslim increase and gaining of territory transpire? Arab strength, at this time, was boosted as Islam united otherwise infuting Arab peoples.
And out of that strength, the Muslim Arab peoples had the power to expand, and they did. Right? As one historian puts it, Muslims, quote, fall for their religion, the prospect of booty, and because their fellow tribesmen were doing it.
[12:23] Now, this expansion started with Syria, and then it encompassed Persia. In Syria, Muslim armies overcame the Byzantine forces, that's who was running Syria at that time, at the very famous battle, the Battle of Yarmouk.

And that, in turn, left the Holy Land without Greek protection, without Byzantine protection. Okay? That's why in 638, Jerusalem surrendered to Muslim assailants.
Okay? The Marauders also attempted to take the capital of Constantinople in 672, about 30 or 40 years later. Constantinople, at that time, was the last dam to stem a rising tide of Muslim expansionism.

Its fall, if it had fallen in the 7th century, would have meant the immediate Islamization of Europe. That's what would have happened. Right? But owing to impressive fortifications, and unmatched military technology, including Greek fire, which is something fun to Google, the threat was neutralized, and the enemy outside the walls of Constantinople was turned back.
But many of those former territories, that have been part of Byzantium, were lost. Elsewhere, the same conquesting trend, continued until the Muslim invaders had taken North Africa, and moved up into Spain, 711 AD.
[13:39] Right? The Christians who were living there, what we call Spain, was a loose Christian population there, made of Visigoth peoples, who were living there at that time. They were broken. Their king's head, King Rodrigo, was sent, the head, not the body, was sent to the caliph in Damascus, who had ordered the conquest there.

And in the following seven years, Muslims took the rest of Spain, which they then called Al-Andalus. Al-Andalus. I think that's where the name for Andorra comes from, actually, in a little teeny country. Yeah. Then the Muslims there were called Moors, because they came from Morocco. And the local people, the Visigoths, called them Moors for that reason. So the Moors would have moved on up into Europe, from that western end, had they not been, of course, routed at the Battle of Poitiers, right, by Charles Martel.
Who repelled the armies of Abd al-Rahman. And Martel's grandson, of course, Charlemagne, would continue in that work. We know this story, right? So that's the first. Second, Muslim antagonism towards the west, that is linked to the medieval crusades, is really a new phenomenon.
That doesn't actually go back to the time of the crusades. Karen Armstrong would suggest that it does. Quite frankly, she's wrong. Okay? Actually, Muslim animosity, Arab Muslim animosity towards the west, that talks about the crusades as the basis, that's really a relatively new thing.
[15:06] In fact, it surfaces in about 1900. It's a little more than 100 years ago. And it's largely in reaction to the decline of the Ottoman Empire, and the modern European colonization of the Near East.

Modern European colonization. It was the last sultan of the Ottomans. He's pictured right there. Abdul Hamid II, he died in 1909, who first began to refer to the European crusades that happened 500 years prior.
Right? And that prompted the first Muslim history of the crusades, which was published in 1899. Okay? That's how this narrative of crusading gets into the mind and imagination of the people there. Now, the book that was published in 1899, it links modern imperialism, the imperialism that was happening right then and there, British imperialism, French imperialism, and so forth. It links that to medieval crusading.
It says there's a link between the two. And that theme, as you can imagine, was actively picked up by Muslim nationalist movements at that time. And it became fodder for the pan-Islamic movement. The rhetoric suggests that the events of modern imperialism paralleled the crusades.
[16:14] And in that context, the crusades were depicted as events whereby, quote, the savage west actually came in to conquer, but they ended up benefiting by absorbing Islam's civilization.

So it was a very propagandistic text. They also suggested that Islam only suffered from the influence of the Latin West because what possible benefit could it obtain from contact with, quote, an inferior backward civilization?
Very propagandistic text that was. Contemporary religious commentator Karen Armstrong has suggested that the crusades, in light of all this, are, quote, one of the first direct causes of the Middle East conflict today.
Okay? Now, that skewed appraisal has gained momentum, as historical research indicates, with the founding of the state of Israel in the mid-20th century. Again, herein, anti-crusader sentiments have grown because of perceptions about Israel's ties to the West.
It's important to see, however, that these feelings and these attitudes are very much about modern events, recent events, rather than anything that actually occurred in the 11th, 12th, and 13th centuries.
[17:22] Okay? In truth, Muslim, as Jonathan Riley Smith of Cambridge University notes, have not, quote, inherited from their medieval predecessors bitter memories of the violence of the crusaders. They did not really inherit that.

That's a modern thing. Before the end of the 19th century, there was hardly any interest in the crusades on the part of Muslim Arabic peoples. They were looked back upon with, quote, indifference and complacency.
Right? The term for crusades did not even exist in Arabic until Christian Arabs translated French histories into the mother tongue in the modern era. Okay? Moreover, even at the time of the crusades, Muslim historians, if you look at documents from that period written by Muslim chroniclers, they paid little attention to the crusades.
Many Arabs, moreover, dismissed the crusades as being mere assaults on the Turks. And they didn't like the Turks any more than the Christians did. Right? So, one crusade era historian, Ibn Zafir, opines that it was better that the Franks occupy the kingdom of Jerusalem because that prevented the spread of the influence of the Turks to other parts of the Middle East.
So, against Karen Armstrong, current Muslim memories and anger towards the crusades are, in fact, a 20th century creation. Late 19th century. Third counterthesis.
[18:41] It's been said that the crusaders were brutal barbarians who ransacked enlightened, peaceful, advanced, and tolerant Muslim civilizations. I think that's all those words that rolled right off the lips of Karen Armstrong. That's a heavily editorialized assessment.

So, we need to consider a few things here to refute that. How were the conquered, how were conquered peoples treated by their Arab Islamic overlords during that period of expansion? Right? On the one hand, the Quran does forbid forced conversion. Yet, many of the conquered peoples were free to choose conversion as an alternative to death or enslavement.
Sometimes Christians and Jews were given more accommodation, right? They weren't killed, but they were forbidden from reading scripture at church together or in their homes. They were given the status of demis. You might know that word.
It's like a lower status. It means that in the context of social life, you kind of occupy a place of humiliation, and you have to pay higher taxes. In some cases, the worst of cases, Christian and Jewish leaders were simply slaughtered.
[19:43] That's what happened in Armenia with the nobles in 705 AD with the Muslim conquest at that time. It also happened to the Jews in Medina under Muhammad's own orders. 700 local Jewish males were forced to dig their own graves before being beheaded.

To be sure, Christians and some of the crusaders could be equally as oppressive. You'll find scandalous and appalling stories. The point is simply that both sides were brutal and intolerant. It's not enlightened, tolerant, and brutal, uncivilized. That's not a fair rendering. What was the nature of the Islamic culture that the crusades allegedly disrupted?
Let me quote one historian. Quote, To the extent that Arab elites acquired a sophisticated culture, and there is evidence of sophistication at this time, they learned it from their subjected peoples. This is what the most definitive scholar in this area has argued, right? Their culture, in fact, the great triumphs of Arab culture in what we might call the early dark ages, their culture was, in fact, the great features of the culture were inheritance from Persia, from Greece, and even India.
[20:53] So, in the territories that the Muslim Arab conquerors invaded in the 7th century onwards, learning, the great learning of these cultures was primarily sustained by the Demi population under the Arab regimes, right?

And so, the interesting thing is that the historians look at the gradual assimilation of the Demi population, the people who were conquered, right? As those populations begin to really assimilate and become truly Islamic, the sophisticated elements of the culture begin to disappear.
Isn't that interesting? I know that is not PC to say, but it's Donald Hill who says it. Donald Hill wrote a book celebrating the enormous contribution that Arabs have made to science and engineering, but he notes that little of that contribution can actually be traced, quote, traced to Arab origin. Most of it, he admits, originated with conquered populations. So, let me give you a few examples. Let me give you some examples instead of just making that claim. That's a very controversial claim. In Avicina, one of the most celebrated Muslim philosophers and scientists of the time, his name was Avicina. He was actually Persian. And if you know anything about Persian culture, it's a culture with great achievement.
[22:10] The so-called Arabic numerals, some of you will know this, are not actually Arabic. They come from India. Those are the numerals that we use. The advanced medicine of Arab culture, which has been acclaimed by many historians, is in fact has its roots in Nestorian Christian culture.

And the leading Muslim and Arab physicians at that time were trained at the monumental Nestorian medical center in Nisibah, Syria. So, the wishful assessment of a sophisticated, enlightened Arab culture ruined by the Crusaders is further called into question by all of this.
And to this we might add a little bit of attention to how Arab Muslim conquerors treated some of the intellectual resources in the lands which were invaded from the 7th century onward, specifically libraries.
And they did obtain a lot of libraries when they took those territories from Byzantium, from the Byzantine Empire. So, when Alexandria, Egypt was taken, for example, everybody knows about the great library in Alexandria, right?
They came, they found the library there, they wrote a letter to Caliph Umar, and they said, what do we do with this library and all these books? And this is what he wrote back, translated, of course.
[23:28] If what is written in its books agrees with the Quran, then those books aren't needed because it's already in the Quran. And if it disagrees with what's in the Quran, then they're not desired.

So destroy all of them. And that is precisely what they did. The scrolls in that library became kindling for the city's 4,000 bathhouses, and it took six months to burn through them.
These illustrations are not selective, they're representative. There are, of course, certain exceptions. And those who write the counter-narrative really like to hone in on the exceptions.
Fourth, the Crusades are not a form of proto-imperialism, as has often been suggested these days. They were not undertaken by the younger sons of Frankish and Saxon and Norman nobility, younger sons who wanted to go out for themselves and secure independent wealth and honor and title and for their families through territorial conquest.
That's how it's been rendered. In truth, crusading was a very expensive, very expensive business. Very, very expensive. It was undertaken at great personal cost, and it came with very modest financial rewards, and it required enormous subsidy.
[24:42] So let's look briefly, let's pause here to look closely at the cost of participating in crusading, right? A knight, if he was to go crusading, needed armor, arms, and at least one war horse, preferably two or three, though.

At least one, preferably two or three. And then you need a palfrey, which is a riding horse, that you ride to the battle, but not in the battle. And then you also needed some mules to carry the luggage, and then, of course, there were servants that required.
Now, a war horse cost about 10 pounds at that time. That was equivalent to two years' salary for a sea captain in the period. So very expensive. Servants, right? And then, in addition to the direct cost of crusading, there was the cost of providing for your family in your absence, right?
The cumulative result, crusading typically, a crusader, crusader, the leader of a crusading band, typically needed to raise four to five times their annual income before they could embark. Very expensive.
That is why, for example, Robert, Duke of Normandy, mortgaged his entire duchy to his brother, William II of England, right? In order to fund a venture to the Holy Land in 1096. So, if you're interested in how the mortgaging worked, you can read about the Vifage systems, which is the interesting and creative way that medieval Christians got around interest.
[25:53] But still kind of had interest. So, yeah. The cost is even higher when you account for loss of life, right? If the crusader died, then what typically happened is the properties that had been mortgaged in the Vifage system, they were foreclosed and the family would be left in financial destitution.

Believe me, it would have been much cheaper to keep those younger sons at home than to send them off to the Holy Land. So, crusading is not an imperialistic activity, right? It drained, rather than generated revenue, right?
And everybody knows that imperialism is about making money, not losing money. With the successes in the Holy Land and the establishment of the little crusader kingdoms, Odessa, Antioch, Tripoli, and Jerusalem, the cost of crusading only increased.
So, they got there, they paid all the money to get there, and then they had to set up permanent garrisons to secure the Holy Land for really just the area where the sites were, the pilgrimage sites. Now, for those who manned these little crusader states, there was no compelling financial reason to remain in Palestine.

In fact, the opposite was true. The knights who were there working, they were often paid poorly and lately, if at all. The motives of these people, they were not financial.
[27:08] These weren't avaricious, greedy people. They were, this was, this was an ideological motive. It was a spiritual motive, right? And that's why the kingdoms, some revenue came from taxing trade caravans that moved through the area, but a lot of support came from subsidies from the kingdoms back in Europe, right?

To quote one scholar, the crusader kingdoms would only, quote, be sustained in Christian hand by subsidies sent from Europe, right? It's like building an outpost on Antarctica. It's not going to be self-sustaining, probably.
You've got to send money to keep the place open. And that is the origin of the crusader taxes that were eventually created and imposed upon the populations in the home countries. Not very popular, as you can imagine.
We'll get to that in a moment. So if you want to understand the motive for crusading, you've got to look elsewhere. One little comparative illustration really drives this home point quite strongly.
In 1063, Pope Alexander II proposed a crusade to drive out the remaining infidel Muslims from Spain, the Moorish peoples, right? Now, unlike the Holy Land, unlike Jerusalem, Moorish Spain was extremely wealthy and it had lots of fertile land, right?
[28:15] So that's a good, if you want to make money, go on that crusade. No one went. No one went. No one signed up. So it never happened, right? 30 years later, when he called for, the next pope called for a crusade to the Holy Land, everybody signed up.

And there was nothing to really gain materially, right? Land and loot were not the motives. This is not an imperialistic type activity at all. Another anecdote worth mentioning along these lines involves Godfrey of Bouillon.
You might know he was one of the first, in the first wave of crusaders. And he was the first crusader king of Jerusalem. They got there, they secured the city back for pilgrims.
And someone said, well, we should make Godfrey king because he was a very gallant, courageous knight and leader. But he refused. He said, he's not going to wear this crown of gold and set up a little kingdom for himself there where his, the king that he went to serve wore a crown of thorns.
So Godfrey famously refused to accept the crown of gold, right? Which tells you something about the motives, the intentions. He just, he set out, if you want to give me a title, call me the defender of the Holy Sepulchre.
[29:22] That was the title he accepted. So now in all of this we get a better, I think, a better informed sense of what the, why they were launched, how to interpret them.

We get familiarity with the back story. We've dispelled certain false motives. And so I want to repeat the statement I made at the beginning. The crusades were not unprovoked. They were not the first round of European colonialism. They were not conducted for land loot and converts.
And the crusaders were not barbarians who victimized the cultivated Muslims. Right? So from a pure worldly historical angle you can see there might actually be a reasonable basis for the crusades.
Right? This isn't about raw antagonism or expansionism. It's not about empire building. It's not about avarice or acquisitiveness. It's certainly not about you know, kind of facilitating dominating conversions.
Right? Nonetheless, as Christians I think we still can take a critical view of these medieval events. Right? But we can take that critical view without redacting history.
[30:23] Right? Without trying to spin the story so that it makes the crusade you know, makes them look like something they weren't. There's a different way to do it. So this is what I want to do now in closing. We're going to shift gears here and we'll do a theological evaluation of crusading.

Kind of probe more deeply into the spiritual rationale animating the crusader spirit. I talked a little bit about this in talk number one so we're going to revisit but I'm going to offer some critique in this. So as I take up the mantle of the naysayer I need to note that crusading in its period was hardly without opposition.
We're not the first people to have a problem with crusading. Right? The opposition however was not always sustained by the highest of motives spiritually speaking. Right? In the actual situation the greatest outcry against crusading was spurred by their adverse economic repercussions.

It always comes back to taxes doesn't it? Always comes back to taxes. As kings got involved with crusading taxes increased because when a king goes off right he can raise a lot of revenue really quickly more than just a knight or another sort of lower lord.
Right? And that is in fact what happened. The first ever income tax implemented as opposed to property tax which was the norm then. The first ever income tax was a tax to fund crusading.
[31:42] Right? The bane of our existence. You know in several senses crusades and income tax. Right? So consider the Saladin tithe of 1188 that was instituted in France and England for the third crusade.

In England Henry II set up this tithe. Suggested it as voluntary. It was not in fact voluntary. As a 10% levy on all revenues and movable properties by everyone who didn't go.
So the people who didn't go had to pay for the people who did go. Following soon in 1199 Pope Innocent III imposed a similar tax 2.5% on all clergy incomes taxing priests and monks.
And in response to that there was open rebellion and non-payment. A new ceiling was reached some 50 years later in 1247 when St. Louis spent 1.5 libra on crusading.
That was more than six times his annual royal revenue. Right? And who do you think paid for that? Right? So these taxes, they hit everybody. Monasteries, priests, merchants, you know, grumbling ensued and sort of a medieval version of the anti-war movement surfaced as a result of that.
[32:53] That was the greatest source of opposition to the crusading and probably one of the decisive factors in the fizzling out of crusading after the fifth. Now in addition to those economic motives, there were also those from the beginning who brought theological condemnation to crusading.

Right? And their critiques were linked to the deeper spiritual forces at play in the crusading mindset. And so I want to build on their legacy in closing now. And there are two matters I think that want our particular attention as we bring a theological critique on crusading.
Number one, we need to look at the medieval penitential system and how it connected with crusading. And then number two, we need to look at what I want to call the relic ethos of medieval Christianity.
And I think these two factors as they combine provide the essential spiritual animating force for the crusades. And because we have to take issue with those, we necessarily have to take issue with crusading.
So let's treat these two subjects here. First, the medieval penitential system. Prior to the Protestant Reformation, Christianity was dominated by what you might call the penitential system.
[34:00] This has been called the generic cause for crusading. The practice of making pilgrimage to a place like Jerusalem dovetailed with the penitential system.

Now, what's a pilgrimage? A pilgrimage can be defined according to one scholar as a journey undertaken from religious motives to a sacred place. In medieval context, the religious motive was most commonly associated with atonement, obtaining forgiveness of sins.
And this specifically applied to sins committed after your baptism. Right? The forgiveness in turn was linked with the performance of certain spiritual activities.
This is called satisfaction. Okay? These are distinctions from medieval scholastic theology. Right? Satisfaction, the whole idea of satisfaction, represents the fact that human sins can entail temporal punishment, punishment here and now, certain types of punitive measures, purpose to bring some sort of restoration.
It can entail, satisfaction can entail temporal punishment even if the person doing it is able to avoid eternal punishment. So they kind of make that distinction there.
[35:19] In the temporal punishment, the satisfaction for sins was seen to have a cleansing, purifying effect on people. It was designed satisfactionary activity was designed to erode unhealthy attachments which stand behind any given sin.

So there's actually some good insight on the way sin works here. Right? Now practically speaking, making a pilgrimage was a common form of satisfaction at this time. Right? Within the medieval sacrament of penance.
Right? And so confessors, the people that heard the sins confessed, when they would then issue a requirement to make satisfaction, right? It's absolution and then you do some satisfaction and you get absolution, right?

They would often direct the person confessing to make a pilgrimage. That was their act of satisfaction and penance. So when Count Terry of Trier murdered his archbishop in 1059, what did his confessor, what satisfaction requirement did his confessor give him?
He said, go to Jerusalem. Go to Jerusalem. Right? The knightly class of Europe featured quite prominently in this penitential pilgrimage arrangement because they were very violent, sinful, but also very religious bunch.
[36:36] In the 10th century, the practitioners of Cluniac monasticism had developed an elaborate system of hostels allowing people to visit the Holy Land, right? So spiritual practice is in place and then the market kind of adapts to facilitate the spiritual practice.

We'll get you to the Holy Land. So of course, all this infrastructure is in place. There's the spirituality beneath it. And then when the destination gets imperiled, the most common destination for a satisfactional penitential act to the Holy Land that involved pilgrimage, right?
When it gets imperiled because Jerusalem is a place you can't visit anymore, spiritual alarm bells went off. Right? And so the crusaders had to march out there to ensure that this very important means of expiation was not short-circuited.
That's how it gets into the system. There's a problem there as you can see. We can put it as follows. The crusaders were unconscionable because the output, because what they did was the output of a theologically flawed and skewed and anti-biblical perspective on atonement and forgiveness.
Right? Now the provenance of that misunderstanding of forgiveness and the whole penitential system, I think its provenance is lexical. Right? Until the time of Erasmus, and you may know a bit about this story, there existed certain common misrenderings of certain New Testament passage.
[38:11] Let me give you a few examples. Acts 2. But Peter said to them, do penance. And be baptized. Acts 17.

And God, indeed, having worked at the times of this ignorance, now declares to all men that they should everywhere do penance. And also another example from Matthew 3.
And in those days cometh John the Baptist preaching in the desert of Judea and saying, do penance, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Now what actually, what's the word that's supposed to be there?
But it was do penance. Why? What's going on there, right? Now that's the English translation I just read you, but it's from the Latin Vulgate. Right? It's from the Latin Vulgate. And that's the source of the blunder.
The Greek is quite different as Erasmus began to discover and Martin Luther himself recognized in a very profound way. Right? And so we begin to see that the biblical basis for this long-standing Catholic sacrament of penance and the element of satisfaction that was part of it is being called into question.
[39:16] Right? There was a mistranslation that is especially relevant to what we're talking about right now. That's why, for example, in our own communion liturgy, we say that Christ made by his death on a cross, quote, a full, perfect, sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world.

You understand? This is the root that stands behind the penitential pilgrimage system of the medieval church, and it is the compromised doctrine that fertilized the crusading impulse.
Okay? And I think this discernment makes it possible for us to impeach the crusades, which is no less than what certain medieval detractors attempted to do, challenging the crusades by indicting the conceptions of forgiveness of sin that were at play therein.
There were people at the time who were doing this. They were just minority voices. Right? You get that, for example, in a report by a guy called Humbert of Romans, general master of the Dominicans, who gave an account of all this at the Council of Lyon in 1274.
Let's turn to the second theological issue, the medieval relic ethos. The theological rationale for crusading is also tied to what I call the relic ethos of medieval Christendom.
[40:37] Right? It is not a stretch to say that the Holy Land fits very neatly into this system, that the whole territory is one enormous relic. Right? Right?

And the desire to protect that relic has been called, quote, the specific reason for the crusade. So the pilgrimage penitential system is kind of the generic reason. The desire to protect this relic is the specific reason.

Right? Now, the relic ethos in the Latin West revolved around a pronounced interest in objects and places associated with Christianity, Christian history, Christian personalities, and events in the gospel.
Right? And that also stands at the base of the pilgrimage culture. Right? So consider this telling reflection by Stephen I of Niblon, medieval, writing about pilgrimage.
This is what he says, quote, considering how many are my sins and the love, clemency, and mercy of our Lord Jesus, because when he was rich became poor for our sake, I have determined to repay him in some measure for everything he has given me freely.
[41:37] And so I have decided to go to Jerusalem where God was seen as a man and spoke with men and to adore the place where his feet trod. The Holy Land is a relic.

Now, the establishment of the Holy Land is one colossal reliquary, which is a place where relics are kept. The whole thing is a giant reliquary. That seeing the Holy Land like that, that actually dates, what's the origin of that?
That goes back to Empress Helena, mother of Constantine. She could go to the most boring place and turn it into a sensational event.
That was her spiritual gift. Now, she went on a sightseeing tour there. And prior to that tour, there was little evidence of Christian interest or fixation on the Holy Land, especially on the part of the West, right?
Western pilgrims to the Holy Land, tiny stream. With Helena's trip, this changed, right? On her personal tour, she did a lot of research and tapped into local traditions linked with Jesus. And so she's the one that identified the site of Christ's tomb, right?
[42:44] Under the Temple of Venus that Hadrian had built. That's the Holy Sepulcher today, right? Constantine, her son, then built a church on top of it at her request. In 333, just as the church that he built on top of the Holy Sepulcher was being finished, the first recorded Western pilgrim arrived from France, right?

And this guy kept an extended itinerary, which has survived, okay? In 385, St. Jerome took a group, did some sightseeing, but despite the fact that he was there with this group, he actually didn't think that doing pilgrimage was really that important in Christian spirituality.
And the opinion of Jerome there, this is important to note, is an opinion that was shared by many of the early church fathers, right? Who actually condemned and sometimes ridiculed the practice of doing pilgrimage. People like Augustine, St. John of Chrysostom, and Gregory of Nyssa.
The public, however, paid a little attention. Things accelerated in the 5th and 5th century with the Emperor Justinian, right? Who did a lot of work to enhance Jerusalem and make it a wonderful, he was kind of a little bit like Herod the Great.
Let's turn this place into the world's best pilgrimage center. The giant, that's what Justinian did, right? Now, that began to change in the 7th century when Jerusalem, as I said earlier, 638 surrendered to the Muslim army, right?
[43:58] And even while there were disruptions, pilgrimage still continued and became a very popular activity, and it was satiated. The impulse to do a pilgrimage was satiated whenever it was politically feasible, right?

And eventually, pilgrimage worked its way right into the heart of the Latin penitential system. Okay? So here's the critique here, right? Again, I'm just building on earlier critical attitudes by Christians like some of the patristic fathers, right?
What's the problem with this whole relic culture and doing pilgrimage and all that? I think it contradicts one of the key New Testament shifts with regard to place, right?
And this shift is something that's very important in what God himself was doing as he changed the nature of his people through the work of the Messiah. In a word, involvement in God's people, true spirituality, according to the New Testament, is no longer tied to a particular geographic place or a building like the temple, right?
That's evidence in a variety of ways in the scriptures, right? First, Jesus, when he talks about the destruction of the temple, which is a sign of new times, new times, right? He's not just talking about time in the chronos sense there, like this is going to happen next year.
[45:14] He's talking about the word times is kairos. It's a new spiritual era. And things are going to be different in this new era. Another example, right? Same theology, very clear in 1st and 2nd Corinthians, chapter 6 of both books, right?

Believers are the new temple, right? There's not a place you go to, right? We are temples of the living God. This is fulfillment of what Jesus says in John 14, 16. My Father and I will make our home in you, right?
We don't make a house for God anymore. You don't want to fix all certain places where you have to go there to be with God. Third, Jerusalem's treatment in the New Testament. Those of you who have kind of well versed in the New Testament scriptures will have discerned this, no doubt. Jerusalem moves away from being a historical referent to something that is more of an eschatological image. So when Jerusalem is used in the New Testament, it's not always just referring to a city and Palestine.
It starts to refer to, it's like a picture of life in the age to come. Does that make sense? Yes. So the, so, and that means that the significance of the historical earthy city is being sort of downgraded and Jerusalem is taken, you know, as, as an image for, for new life and full redemption and restoration, the city of Zion.
[46:35] That's a, and that I think reflects the change that God is himself orchestrating between Judaism and Christianity, moving Christianity as a global multi-ethnic faith that's not linked to a particular place or a particular people for that matter.

Right? Now all this means that to be connected and close to God and to be involved in all the benefits of connection with God, that can happen wherever you are. It can happen wherever you are.
Now to be sure, Holy Land visits, you know, they still have some benefit because they support the historical nature of Christianity, right? God did become man. He lived in this place, right? Yet that benefit as it was expressed in the context of medieval Christianity seems to have morphed into something rather superstitious.
And the result was a fixation on Palestine that afforded it the spiritual status that is really not more to how it's treated in Scripture and in a perspective on the Holy Land that is in fact rejected by the church fathers and critiqued by the patristic leaders.
Right? And so in this sense, the destruction of the temple and the dispersion of the church, book of Acts, right? These are events that recoil against the pilgrimage culture that stood behind the Crusades, right?
[47:44] And so to critique that theology of place is necessarily to call crusading into question, right? It's the logical implication. Israel is not to be to Christians what Mecca is to Muslims.

That's the point, right? Were the Crusades an attempt to make it something like that? Reflecting the spirituality of the time, right? Is crusading, therefore, defending a form of spirituality that the Bible, the New Testament itself rejects?
That's the question we have to ask ourselves. In Christ, God seems to have changed the game. And so the older spiritual sensibilities of Judaism and its fixation on Jerusalem and the temple, they get sublimated to the long-awaited outworking of the covenant.
So to continue to cling to those older sensibilities, that older form of spirituality, and not to embrace the new one, is to be out of sync with God's own purposes and the redemption of the world.
And I think, in a sense, crusading is an example of being out of sync. All right. That's all I've got for today. We have a few minutes for questions. If you want to read further, I've put a few recommended resources here.
[48:54] Yes, sir. We're more independent than an individualist in the Western culture in the East, down the East, and it's so wide.

Could that be a wonder? Is that true? Good question. I don't know the answer. I don't know if I can answer that without doing some further thought on it. Yeah. Yes, ma'am.
First one is a comment. I can totally agree with what you said about Jerusalem being a relic. We were in Jerusalem about a year and a half ago. It is a relic.
Yeah. It is a relic. I mean, my mother always wished she could go to Jerusalem, and I'm so glad she never got the chance. So it's good. Yeah. But my question is, I know it's the first title, is Fighting for Christendom.
And when you critique the crusades from a theological perspective, do you have anything to say on that question? Do we need to fight for Christendom? Yeah, it's a good question. I mean, the crusades are very much an out-of-by-product of the Christendom mentality.
[49:58] And there was really nothing else on offer, you have to realize, that people couldn't even imagine another world, right? Because this was before the dawn of secularism. Today, no, I think

Christendom is, whether we grieve it or not, it is a thing of the past.

Is it something that we should seek to reestablish? I don't think so. My leanings are a little bit more with our Anabaptist brothers and sisters on this question, which is that, you know, the...
We are to be the people of God in places where we don't necessarily enjoy sort of influence and power at the level of dominant culture and the political institutions therein.
Yeah, so, and Christendom was, in a sense, it was a little bit, a loose analogy to what Israel was in the Old Testament before the exile. I think our paradigm is, if we want to think about existence as the people of God now, what that looks like, kind of an area of what we might call political theology, I think we'd do better to go to the book of Daniel.
Yeah. Yes, sir? To what extent is intellect... In the life of the church, I mean, as a collective, to what extent is intellectual dishonesty about the past a concern?
[51:16] To what extent is it sinful, in fact? To what extent should we be concerned? A great American novelist, I won't mention her name, says, I think, with great insight, one of her greatest rhetorical statements is, the past is a guilty thing.

And she's saying that modernity lives off of a denigration of the past for its own ideological purposes. Could you just comment on that kind of thing?
Yeah, I think, you know, we are, even, you know, even a lot of very celebrated historians and scholars still carry certain prejudices and, you know, and biases in their work.
I mean, the idea of peer review is to try to filter that out a little bit. I think it's also common just amongst Christians, you know, like, if someone like Karen Armstrong mistells the story of the Crusades.
And I'm not saying the account I, you know, offered is sort of the perfect objective account, right, but I am taking her to task and others like her on a few things. If she does that, then there's a lot of Christians who do the same thing, just with a different bent.
[52:26] And I think, actually, I would say part of discipleship and Christian integrity is to be truth-tellers. Even when the truth is inconvenient to us, or even when it works against vested interest, and I believe that's actually a very authentic Protestant conviction, right?

Because, you know, what was the, Martin Luther nailed the theses to the door of the church. What was number one? What was the theses number one on the list of 95?
Repentance is it? Yeah, go ahead. I was going to say the song of indulgence. Well, that was part, yeah, that was part, but repeat. We'll let Dr. Packer answer. Well, when the thesis number one was, when Jesus called on people to repent, he was calling for a change of heart, like he said, rather than any form of penance.
I don't remember the exact words, but that's the substance, isn't it? Yes. And one of the other ideas that's present in that is that repentance is, it's a norm for Christian life.
It's not something you do once. Did that. Okay. Right? It's a norm. In fact, it's not even a weekly norm. Right? It's like, well, if you're like my wife, it's an hourly norm. Just kidding.
[54:02] She would say that about me. It's a minutely norm for me. It's a minutely norm. Right? So, we don't, I mean, to be people of spiritual integrity, right, means that we don't, you know, if we're distorting things, right, for best interest, we're actually betraying our fundamental convictions.

Right? And I think beneath all of that is, you know, if you dig deep enough, you probably run into the old issue of, you know, not really relying on God as the source of your salvation.
Right? So, you're having to tell history in a certain way or talk about the church in a certain way, you know, to kind of achieve something. Why are you trying to achieve that? We can't achieve that. Right? I mean, we all make the general confession every Sunday, but I'm not sure how many people actually believe it.
I have sin and thought and word and deed. You know, we kind of say it. Right? But if it's true, then we should expect repentance to be the norm. And that, of course, that practice touches on every area of life, including the life of the mind, the life of the work of historiography, whatever.
Right? Yeah. Yes, sir. Do you know how, when we looked at the theological assessment of the crusade from our point of view, but how would, do you know, how would the, actually, yeah.
[55:19] How would the Roman Catholic of today, the official Catholic doctrine of the theology of today, come from Vatican, how would they assess the receiving?

That's a great question. And I would like to go explore it. Yeah. Yeah. Because the sacrament and the understanding of what's involved in the sacrament of penance, right, which we've talked about a

good amount, it is still in place there.
Right? Now, I imagine they might say that that was a, satisfaction is still a good thing. That was a warped expression of satisfaction. Right? So, and they would maybe appeal to the principle, the abuse of the thing doesn't negate the thing of itself.
Whereas Protestants would say there's a DNA problem there. Right? It's a DNA problem. Yeah. Yes, ma'am. Thank you for tracing back relic and possibilities there.
Because, you know, we caught entirely of a man in Europe. Everybody wanted a relic. I mean, a terrific impetus to the tourist industry, you know. But also, you know, I found people actually adoring pieces of the true cross.
[56:28] And there are enough of those around to create a forest of our own. In Spain, I mean, I'm talking about today, you know, taking school children into a cathedral to see these things.

Now, this whole emphasis on there is some blessing in this particular little thing. And everybody, every cathedral in Europe wanted a relic to bring people to them and sort of increase the revenue, among other things.
But the church seemed to be condoning this. It wasn't just about saving Jerusalem or reclaiming Jerusalem or whatever. It was, it had its impact on the whole of Europe.
And I would say quite possibly places that were colonized by Europe as well. The other thing that, that I wondered if you found out how it started, the idea of forgiving sins that you haven't committed yet.
And certainly the Crusaders did experience that. It wasn't just your past sins will be forgiven. But when you go to Jerusalem, the things that you may have to do to guard the faith will also be forgiven.
[57:39] That's right. I mean, that's, where does that come from? Yeah, it's kind of a license. Yeah, exactly. That's right. Yeah. Well, the indulgences did the same thing. Yeah. But, you know, quite a long time after.

Yeah. The issue with relics and the relic culture, whether it's applied to the Holy Land as a whole or to the wood of the cross, I think Calvin said there's enough crosswood in medieval Europe at his time for like several hundred crosses maybe or something.
Yeah. Somebody wasn't telling the truth. Exactly. You know. If you go to the biblical basis, there is, you know, there is a kind of a loose biblical basis.
You go to the book of Acts, I think it's chapter 17. Paul leaves a little handkerchief or something, right? And there's a miracle associated with that object. Oh, yeah.
Yeah. Yeah. And so, you know, that's like the, but the relic culture that developed, boy, that was a lot to hang on that little hook. Yeah. I think the hook kind of went like that after a while, you know.
[58:39] And that's the issue, right? It's something that's present in scripture, but it's quite minor. It's, you know, it's just almost an oblique reference. Yet it becomes the basis for something that kind of is a major pillar of medieval spiritual.

And then things in the scriptures, which are much more major and significant, kind of get minimized. So things are out of proportion and out of balance. And that's often how these types of problems arise, right?
You can technically find a biblical basis, you know, but there's one story like that. And so why is everybody fixated on that? And, you know, and you think, you know, to encounter God, I've got to go to Jerusalem or I've got to go look at the Shroud of Turin or whatever.
I think C.S. Lewis got it right in his Sermon, The Weight of Glory. Next to, you know, he says next to the Blessed Sacrament, the most holy thing you'll ever encounter is your neighbor, especially a neighbor that's filled with the Holy Spirit. So why do you got to go to Jerusalem?
Why don't you just go to your neighbor? Right? You know? Well, Jason's point, I really, but this, you must come back. I know you've got to run now. You must come back and go further.
[59:42] A great Catholic historian, Brad Gregory, who's lectured at Regent and he's at Notre Dame. He says rather provocatively, but I think very insightfully, that our Christian ancestors, if they could see us, medieval and even, I think, Reformation Christians, 17th century Christians, the thing they would despise about us the most would be our tolerance, he says.

Our tolerance is really a betrayal. We're tolerant because we don't care. That's right. That's right. These medieval people, they, oh, they cared so crazily.

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. But maybe their distorted caring puts us to shame in some sense. Yeah. I don't know. Yeah. But I appreciate the balance that you've brought to this today.
You've got to go, don't you? I've got to go. I've got 10.03. Is that good for you? Yeah, we'll do one more. One more. This is an easy one. Just two or three sentences. The scope and synthesis of what you have done today is exceptional for our teachings.
Wow. Thank you. Yes. Thank you. Thank you. It's a labor of love. This is more than a Regent paper.
[60:55] This is almost a thesis or something, or a book. Where is this coming from? A lot of these sources, plus some others.

But are you doing more than two lectures? There's no behind you. I really, I'm just very interested in the Crusades. Yeah. I'm just very interested. Yeah. And we have a guy at the church.
You might, I don't think his family goes to this church. He's a guy at our church. He's a lawyer in town. But before he was a lawyer, he did his degree, a master's degree at NYU in medieval philosophy.
But he wasn't really interested in philosophy, and so he ended up studying the Crusades instead. So I've had a number of conversations with him. And he's actually translated a lot of the medieval French texts. And so we've been talking for about a year.
And we've collaborated on a number of things. And it's kind of spurred, I've discovered a new interest, you know, in the Crusades. But also just, the Crusades is just one entry point into medieval spirituality and understanding Christian identity, Christian belief, you know, in a pre-enlightenment context as a way of getting a better sense of what's distinct, unique, gainful, and sometimes ridiculous in our own context.
[62:09] But you have to go into a different world almost. And this is a different world, right? The gap here is almost as big as the gap between us and, like, first century Palestine, who in certain ways the gap's less there because our civilization is quite a lot like Roman civilization.

And there are many parallels, right? So, anyway. So you're not out for a credential. You are working from interest, I thought. Yeah, yes, from interest. Yeah. Thank you. Yeah. Thank you.
Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.