

The Warrior and the Wise Man

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*For the recording of this monologue delivered on July 15, 2018,
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*(N.B. This monologue was delivered extemporaneously.
What follows is one version, and is not the same as what is in the recording.)*

It was the year 1146 by our reckoning, that is, the Christian reckoning, Easter Sunday. Such a crowd had gathered, there was not space in town to accommodate us all, so they erected a wooden platform in a field. The king of France, Louis—with his cross given him by the Pope—and Bernard, the holy abbot of Clairvaux, ascended the platform.

It was easy to see that Bernard was a holy man. His love and devotion to God radiated from him like a light that cloud-covered day. His clear voice communicated that love to us. I, myself, felt a longing, though I knew not for what. I was just a farm boy, unmarried, from a large family, perhaps too big for the land we tended, unneeded, without purpose. So when Bernard spoke about our duty to love God with all our soul and with all our mind and with all our strength even unto death, I felt—as we all did—that he was speaking directly to me. He spoke of our duty to love our neighbor as ourselves. He spoke especially of our neighbors to the east, our brothers and sisters who suffered under the oppression of infidels and heathens. He spoke of the devastation of Edessa and our duty to liberate the people there from their pagan rulers, that this would be an act of greatest charity and duty to the King of all.

And so I, along with so many others, took the cross, took the crusade vow, and resolved to set forth toward the Holy Land, to wage war against the pagans who occupied it, and to

liberate it for the people of God. We traveled East, across Europe, through Constantinople, and South, into the Levant. It was there I became ill. I don't know how long I lay delirious in my tent, but when I came to, I found that my companions had abandoned me, left me in the care of a strange old man—perhaps the age of my father or grandfather—with an accent I couldn't place. I think this man must have been a doctor, a healer of some sort. He nursed me back to health. And as he did so, we talked.

He asked me where I was going.

“To the Holy Land,” I said.

“Why?” he asked.

“To free it from the infidels,” I answered.

He asked me what I knew of this “Holy Land.” I admitted I didn't know much. It was where our savior had lived and died. It was where his ancestor, Solomon, had built the temple. It was the Kingdom of God.

“Kingdom of God,” he repeated, and it made me think of the Gospel of Luke:

“Neither shall they say, ‘Lo here!’ or, ‘lo there!’ for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you.”

He asked me about God, my relationship to the King of all. I realized that, not only was the kingdom of God within me, but so too were the idolaters and infidels I would wage war against. That is to say, what kept me from God was my own infidelity and tendency toward idolatry. How could I wage war against infidels and idolaters in the Holy Land when I had not even conquered those within me?

At least, that's what I was thinking up until one night I came upon him praying. He did not pray like a Christian. I don't know how I didn't notice this before. He prayed on a small rug, facing South, towards Jerusalem, or perhaps someplace beyond. As he bowed and laid his

forehead against the floor, I realized that he was my enemy, that he was a Muslim! Filled with rage and shame at having been tricked by this Satan, I recovered my sword and stabbed him through the heart as he lay prostrate on his rug. With blood running out of him onto the sand, I hurriedly gathered my things and headed on, hoping to catch up with my companions and wage war against these devils.

Alas, I was out of food and short on water. I needed help. As I approached a village at dawn, I heard cries from the rooftops, a strange melodic language. It was the language the old man was muttering before he died, before I killed him. It was a Muslim village. I realized I was already in enemy territory. But that if I was to survive, I would have to depend upon their hospitality. So I presented myself as one of them, tried to mimic them as best I could, pretended to pray with them, performing the same movements I saw my healer perform before I murdered him. They took me in, took care of me, and I realized, these were not the arrogant heathens I had been led to expect. In time, I learned that they worshiped the same God I did, that they honored Jesus and Mary just as I did. True, they followed a prophet I had never heard of, but they were not the infidels I thought they were.

I realized that I had made a grave mistake in violating that sacred commandment, murdering my own teacher, my own healer. In order to atone for my bloodguilt, I would travel back home, back to France and—if I could—back to Bernard to teach him what I had learned: that Muslims worship the same God we do, that they love the same God we do, that they are not our enemies, that our enemies are within us, that this is the greater Crusade.

And so I did. I traveled back north, and west, and into the Rhineland, where I came upon a village, this village. I saw smoke, heard shouting: “Christ killers,” they yelled. I knew they were speaking about you. I knew it was wrong. I tried reasoning with them, but there was no

reason to be had. They were burning your homes, your businesses. I heard a cry. It was you, crying from inside a house. I ran into save you. I would have saved more, but I collapsed outside on the way back in.

I'm sorry I could not save more of you. I'm sorry I will not make it back to my homeland. I will never get to deliver my message to Bernard.