

THE COST

AUTHOR – R. CODY PHILLIPS

SYNOPSIS

This two-act play centers on the last week of Jesus' earthly ministry. Thematically, this presentation is designed to emphasize that there is a "cost" to discipleship, and that cost depends in large measure on the individual's relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. In this drama, five different persons must face the ultimate question of how they will relate to the Son of God and whether or not they are willing to pay the price.

- Pontius Pilate is an efficient and effective Roman administrator. After investing more than three decades in a variety of progressively more demanding and visible positions, this able bureaucrat has reached the threshold of success. Personally chosen by the emperor to serve as prefect (governor) of the troublesome province of Judea, Pilate knows that failure would be the end of his career, but success would bring rewards that men of his class could only dream of achieving. All Pilate must do is please the Roman Emperor Tiberius. Here is a character that some in the audience might see in themselves: please the boss and receive the corner office, a handsome salary, stock options, and all the world values as success. For Pilate (and all those like him), doing what is right means doing what is pleasing to his earthly benefactor.
- Philip is one of the Twelve, who have been with Jesus for three years. A young man, perhaps only 19, he has the whole world before him. What looked like a promising career as a fisherman in Bethsaida has been on hold while he attended to his Master. It is an annoying, but accepted circumstance by his prospective in-laws, who adore him, and his fiancé, who has been his childhood sweetheart. But when the family and his fiancé press for resolution and commitment, Philip makes the hard decision to follow Jesus. Doing so is not without cost. For Philip (and others), the question is how much will he surrender to follow the Master. He loses his sweetheart and later—albeit briefly—even Jesus, along with one of his new friends, Judas Iscariot.
- Judas Iscariot, another one of the Twelve, also had spent three years with Jesus, but his attachment to the Master was different than Philip's. Judas was like most of the population in Judea, but everything changed when he met Jesus. As one of the Twelve, he became somebody. The "perks" were not significant, but there was every reason to believe that this would eventually change once Jesus came to power—and Judas intended to be there to ensure it happened (and that he received some of the residual benefits too). History is littered with able lieutenants, who faithfully served their mentors, and in advancing their careers, the lieutenants benefitted as well. Judas saw his chance to rise above everyone else while riding on Jesus' coattails. For Judas, it would only cost a small investment of time and thoughtful manipulations to position Jesus in his rightful place.
- Nicodemus, already challenged by all that he has heard, met Jesus in a one-on-one interview. Since that encounter, his soul has been troubled. His devotion to the Law, his position in society, and everything that his respected friends and colleagues said worked against a clear understanding of who Jesus was. His heart pushed in one direction, but his mind was conflicted. Not until the final days did everything fall into place. Nicodemus truly was born again, but not without the cost of losing his position and many of his former friends and colleagues. How many others in the centuries that followed have struggled making that 16-inch connection between the heart and the mind? So many "believers" have religion, but so few have a convicting faith that knows that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God.
- And finally, there is Joseph of Arimathea, who consistently tries to do the right thing. He is a good man, but his basic kindness and thoughtfulness puts him at cross-purposes with his colleagues. The process of recognizing the Messiah is based on his own eyewitness and the unwitting guidance from Nicodemus. Ever faithful to being true, Joseph of Arimathea willingly pays the price of earthly relationships and position to remain constant with the one true God. Joseph probably still has much to learn, but it is unmistakable that he is solidly aligned with his friend Nicodemus and a committed follower of Jesus Christ before the story herein ends.

Administrative Notes:

- All scriptural citations for Jesus are taken from the New American Standard Bible.
- The play could stand alone without music, which would make the total production, depending upon the length of the intermission, about 90 minutes. With appropriate choral pieces interspersed, the production would be about two and one-half hours, with a 15-minute intermission.

INDEX OF SCENES

Prologue

Act I

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Scene 1 | 6 |
| Pilate's lament | |
| Scene 2 | 7 |
| The Disciples wonder about Jesus' mission | |
| Scene 3 | 9 |
| Philip Chooses Jesus | |
| Scene 4 | 12 |
| Pharisees Wonder about Jesus | |
| Scene 5 | 14 |
| The Disciples learn of Lazarus | |
| Scene 6 | 15 |
| Jesus raises Lazarus | |
| Scene 7 | 17 |
| Jesus scatters the Temple | |
| Scene 8 | 19 |
| Nicodemus meets Jesus | |
| Scene 9 | 20 |
| The Sanhedrin Plots | |

Intermission

Act II

| | |
|---------------------------|-----------|
| Scene 1 | 24 |
| The Last Supper | |
| Scene 2 | 25 |
| In the Garden, His Arrest | |
| Scene 3 | 26 |
| Jesus before Pilate | |
| Scene 4 | 29 |
| Eli's remorse | |
| Scene 5 | 30 |
| The Crucifixion | |
| Scene 6 | 31 |
| Consequences | |

| | |
|----------------------|-----------|
| Scene 7 | 32 |
| Pilate's Fate | |
| Scene 8 | 34 |
| Jesus is Alive | |

CAST LIST

In order of appearance

Claudia – Wife of Pontius Pilate

Pontius Pilate – Roman Governor/Prefect of Judea

Julius – Roman Centurion and Aide to Pilate

Judas Iscariot – One of the Twelve Disciples of Jesus

Philip – One of the Twelve Disciples of Jesus

Jesus Christ

Joseph of Arimathea – A Pharisee and Member of the Sanhedrin

Eli – Father of Rebecca

Rebecca – Fiancé of Philip

Samuel – Younger Brother of Rebecca

Rachel – Mother of Rebecca

Nicodemus – A Pharisee and Member of the Sanhedrin

Gamaliel – A Pharisee and Member of the Sanhedrin

Peter – One of the Twelve Disciples of Jesus

Thomas – One of the Twelve Disciples of Jesus

Martha – Sister of Lazarus

Elias – Friend of Martha and Lazarus

Lazarus – Friend of Jesus

Jacob – Merchant in Jerusalem

Sarah – Wife of Jacob

Isaac – Sadducee

Aaron – Sadducee

Caiaphas – Sadducee and Chief Priest

Matthew – One of the Twelve Disciples of Jesus

Guard – Roman Soldier on Pilate's Staff

Thief One – Condemned Criminal

Thief Two – Condemned Criminal

Alexander – Roman Centurion and Replacement of Julius

THE COST

Act I

Scene 1

Pilate's lament

Pontius Pilate, holding a paper and looking both pre-occupied and detached, is approached by his wife, Claudia.

CLAUDIA

Pilate, these people, this heat, this wretched city: it's all too much. No amusements, no luxuries, no friends: the food is dull, and so are the people. Four years we have been here. Four years. How much longer must we stay in Caesarea? Are you listening to me? When are we leaving Judea? [*Annoyed by his inattention she advances on him, and sounds both critical and scolding.*] Ignoring me Pilate will not make me go away. What is so important that you cannot even give me these few minutes?

PILATE

[*Still distracted*] I have received correspondence from the emperor. He is not impressed by my efforts. Tax receipts are lower than expected, and rumors of a rebel leader [*he glances at the paper*]—a Jewish messiah—have reached his ears. If I cannot control the situation, he asserts that [*reading from the paper*] my “services to the emperor may not be welcomed and the promise of future rewards would be withheld.”

CLAUDIA

So what does that mean? Are we returning to Rome? Or am I condemned to stay in this wretched province another four years?

PILATE

[*Turning to face her*] Oh Claudia, you are not the only one who wants to return to Rome. Do you think for one moment that I have any affection for these Jews or their land—or even their wretched messiah? But this is my chance to excel. This is my chance to prove to the emperor that I am worthy of greater things. You know that I am. I know that I am capable of greatness, but I must prove myself to Tiberius Caesar first.

CLAUDIA

[*Resigned to her fate*] So we must stay here in obscurity forever?

PILATE

No, we must stay here until the emperor is convinced that I am worthy of his attention. It is the only thing that justifies staying here. Success here means hope and prosperity for the future. [*Stiffening his body with a sense of resolution and looking away from his wife*] We will raise tax revenues, we will maintain control on this province, and we will crush any rebels the Jews might produce. I will show Tiberius that I am able to do more. I will return to Rome triumphant. [*Suddenly turning on Claudia*] Now finish your packing. We still must go to Jerusalem next week for their ridiculous Passover. If there is going to be any trouble in Judea that is when the Jews will choose to start it.

Enter Centurion Julius. Exit Claudia.

PILATE

It's bad enough that I suffer this wretched land for four years. To make it worse, a full week of my life must be wasted in that joyless Jerusalem every time those Jews have a Passover. No stadium. No theater. No amusements at all. Just a mass of sweaty Jews and those insufferable priests!

JULIUS

Prefect, it is your responsibility to be the emperor's personal representative at these festivals.

PILATE

Julius, do not presume to tell me my duty. You're not the only centurion in Palestine. There are others I could appoint to be on my staff instead of you. Which reminds me, you seem to be getting very friendly with these Jews. If you're not careful, you might become one of them.

JULIUS

[Light heartedly] Not likely Prefect. I am what they call a Gentile, but I confess that there are some intriguing aspects of their religion that I respect.

PILATE

You are a Roman centurion. Your allegiance is to the emperor, and I am the emperor's personal representative. Don't forget your place centurion.

JULIUS

Yes sir.

PILATE

I assume those are papers you want me to see. Let me have them Centurion....

Scene 2

The Disciples wonder about Jesus' mission

As the lights come up center stage, some people are gathered around Jesus listening to what he is saying to individuals and observing perhaps a couple of small miracle healings. Others are wandering in and settling around Jesus as a conversation between Judas and Philip takes place.

JUDAS

[Looking around at the gathering crowd] So Philip, once again a bunch of strangers—and a poor lot too—waiting to hear Jesus speak. *[Annoyed and frustrated]* This is getting tiresome. Don't you agree? How much more has he got to teach them? How much more can he teach them? When is he going to take charge? I mean, come on, when are we going to start showing some profit from all this activity?

PHILIP

Profit? Judas, what are you talking about. You can't put a price on what we've learned from the Master. This is about God and his kingdom....

JUDAS

[*Interrupting*] Exactly! That's just it! For three years now, Jesus has dragged us around Judea and Galilee and everywhere in between healing, telling stories, and proclaiming "The Kingdom." Okay, that's all good. But I think after three years of this activity, it's fair to ask: when is it going to happen? When is he going to take over and use his power to rule? And when do we get some authority to rule with him? No one gives up three years without getting something in return.

PHILIP

Is that why you started following him? You were looking for power and money—a tangible reward? Judas, Jesus has given us more than that. We have seen a glimpse of heaven, and we have been with the Son of God. [*Calmer and gentler in tone*] Judas, you cannot deny his love and his compassion. [*Motioning towards Jesus*] You can see it in his eyes when he looks at people—when he looks at us. No matter what we—or others—have done, his love never changes. Who else has ever loved you like that?

JUDAS

[*Humbly*] No one.

PHILIP

Well, isn't that better than power and profit?

JUDAS

[*For a moment, he is about to agree and then suddenly reacts, as if quickly awakening from a dream.*] Wait a minute. Love is not going to protect us from the wrath of the priests or the Sanhedrin. The leaders don't like Jesus. [*Pause, and in a frustrated outburst*] They hate him! They're probably plotting to arrest him; they might even be planning to kill him—and maybe us too. If Jesus delays in asserting his power and authority, I'm not sure that following him is worth the risk. I don't want to be standing next to him when they arrest him. Love is nice, but I want something I can touch and control myself.

PHILIP

This has been hard on all of us, and there are many uncertainties ahead. But with all we've learned and seen, I'm going to trust Jesus for whatever happens.

Jesus rises and moves to center stage. Judas sees the movement.

JUDAS

Look. I think he is finally ready to speak to the crowd.

JESUS

If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple. Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost, to see if he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation, and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him, saying, "This man began to build and was not able to finish." Or what king, when he sets out to meet another king in battle, will not first sit down and take counsel whether he is strong enough with ten thousand men to encounter the one coming against him with twenty thousand? Or else while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks terms of peace. So therefore, no one of you can be My discipline who does not give up all his own possessions. Therefore, salt is good; but

even salt has become tasteless, with what will it be seasoned? It is useless either for the soil or for the manure pile; it is thrown out. He who has ears to hear, let him hear. [Luke 14:26-35]

PHILIP

He's never said anything like that before.

JUDAS

[*Concerned*] No, he hasn't.

Jesus circulates briefly amongst the crowd and quietly exits as Philip and Judas are approached by a rabbi who has been listening intently to Jesus.

JOSEPH

I am Joseph of Arimathea. You are two of Jesus' disciples, are you not?

PHILIP

Yes sir, we follow the Master.

JOSEPH

This is the Jesus who has performed many miracles in Galilee and attracted so many people with his words of wisdom. Now that I have heard him myself I can understand why so many are drawn to him. I should very much like to meet him, but I am committed to visiting a friend in Bethany and then being in Jerusalem in time for Passover. Perhaps your master might be in the City of David during the Passover celebration and we could meet then? I would like him to meet some others as well. Would that be possible?

JUDAS

Yes, I think Jesus will be in Jerusalem for Passover. I'm sure I can make the necessary arrangements.

JOSEPH

Thank you. I am a member of the Sanhedrin. It will not be difficult to find me when you arrive in Jerusalem. Thank you. (*Exit*)

JUDAS

[*With a hearty slap on Philip's back*] Well, what do you think of that? Joseph of Arimathea is on the Sanhedrin. I think we finally got the attention of someone who recognizes Jesus and us—and wants to be our friend.

Scene 3 **Philip Chooses Jesus**

[In a small room, a family is gathered around a simple table set for a modest meal.]

ELI

Rachel, you have prepared another excellent meal—one that our dear Rebecca would do well to remember, since she will have a husband of her own to feed one day [*he says with a chuckle and a knowing wink towards his daughter*].

REBECCA

Oh papa, you're going to embarrass me—again. [*She rises to clear the table and exits briefly.*]

ELI

Well, why shouldn't I? You and Philip have been seeing each other long enough. I think it's time we all started talking about your future with that young man. [*By now, Rebecca has exited, but the rest of the family is still present.*] Philip is of age, and he has done well as a fisherman. I think it is time we begin planning for the future for Rebecca and Philip. Well, mother, wouldn't you agree?

REBECCA

[*Entering quickly, with Philip in tow*] Momma, Papa: look who came to visit.

ELI

Ah Philip, we were just talking about you—and Rebecca [*he says with a knowing wink*]. I think we've reached a point in your relationship where we should announce your engagement. You're a fine young man Philip. I think you would make a fine son-in-law and a good husband for my Rebecca.

PHILIP

Yes, sir. You know I love your daughter very much, but these past three years, I have been spending much time with the Rabbi Jesus, and—well—I

ELI

Son, I think it is wonderful that you have become more religious, and I appreciate your close attachment to this Galilean Rabbi. He seems like a competent teacher and wise man, but the time has come when you and Rebecca must set firm plans for the future. Wandering around the desert with Jesus will not put food on the table or provide for my daughter. So I think next week would be a good time to publicly announce your engagement. This will give you sufficient time to build your home and establish your career at the peak of the fishing season—and I'll help you with that, of course. So, this time next year, you two can be wed. [*Rachel and Rebecca embrace joyfully. Little Samuel starts cheering.*]

SAMUEL

Yeah! We're going to have a wedding! Rebecca and Philip are getting married. Mama, can I go tell my friends?

PHILIP

You are very kind sir. I love Rebecca very much, but I won't be here next week. I am traveling to Jerusalem.

ELI

What? [*Pause*] Well, yes, of course: it's Passover, I was thinking of taking the family for a short visit next week too. You can travel with us.

PHILIP

Thank you sir. But you see, well, it's not merely being in Jerusalem for Passover. I'll be traveling with Jesus—and He is expecting me to be there with him.

ELI

That's a nice gesture for your rabbi. I can understand that in your religious fervor you would want to be in Jerusalem for this festival, but Philip, we're talking about your engagement to my daughter and your marriage

to her next year. I think the Almighty would excuse you from being with your friends in Jerusalem for the entire week. You can celebrate Passover with us—and Rebecca.

PHILIP

Sir, Jesus expects me to be with him.

ELI

Boy, I expect you to be here with us! You've had enough religion! It's time you grew up, settle down. Think about what matters. Think about what is important.

PHILIP

[*Calmly, but firmly*] Yes sir, but I think the important thing....

ELI

[*Interrupting*] I am not allowing my daughter to wait for some idealistic follower of an itinerant rabbi from a second-rate village such as Nazareth, who I understand has a questionable parentage and no financial security. Enough of this nonsense! Beggars in the wilderness do not raise families, and I won't have my daughter eating locusts and honey in the desert. It's time you decided what you're going to do with your life, boy.

PHILIP

Sir, I appreciate what you're saying, but Jesus....

ELI

Enough. I am weary of this Jesus. [*He visibly pauses to regain his composure.*] Listen son: you can live a peaceful, prosperous, and happy life with Rebecca here in Bethsaida, or you can listen to sermons in the desert for the rest of your life. [*He pauses, but Philip says nothing. Turning to Rachel as he rises to leave*] Youth is wasted on the wrong people. If this boy is no longer interested in my daughter, I don't want him in this house. There are other men in Bethsaida—realistic men. [*Turning back on Philip*] Think about what I've said. My daughter will not marry an idealistic boy—and I don't care how religious he is.

Eli storms off stage as Rachel looks at Philip.

RACHEL

Philip, Eli had great hopes for you and Rebecca. He'll calm down in a few days, so you can make peace with him. But I think it's time you gave up this idealism and faced reality. Rebecca cannot be your wife if you're going to spend your life following Jesus.

SAMUEL

Mama, is there still going to be a wedding?

RACHEL

[*Sigh*] No Samuel, I don't think so. It seems that Philip has other plans.

Rachel takes Samuel by the hand and leads him off stage, leaving Philip and Rebecca alone.

REBECCA

I don't understand this Philip. We had talked about the future. We had made plans. We shared dreams—and hopes. And now you want to throw all that away? I don't understand.

PHILIP

Rebecca, it's hard to explain. I love you more than life itself, but when I am with Jesus I feel his power, and I'm amazed by his wisdom. When he speaks, it's as though I am hearing God Himself.

REBECCA

[*Rebecca snickers and says disdainfully*] Oh, Philip, father sees you quite clearly, doesn't he? Hearing God speak. Philip, this is not sane.

PHILIP

I know Rebecca, I know; it sounds strange. But everything he says and does is—well, it's more than what a prophet would say or do—it's divine. Rebecca, some people say he is the Messiah. Rebecca, I think he is the Messiah. [*She lowers her head.*] No one could deny what he has done or doubt the things he has said—and for three years now—unless he really was God's anointed. Rebecca, he's going to Jerusalem next week for Passover, and many of us think that something important will happen there. I want to be with him.

REBECCA

Oh grow up Philip. Whoever heard of a carpenter's son from Nazareth becoming the Messiah.

PHILIP

[*He shrugs his shoulders.*] The Messiah must come from somewhere. Why not Nazareth? Rebecca, I don't have all the answers. I only know what I've seen with my eyes and heard with my ears. Come with me. See for yourself. I'll introduce you to Jesus. Then you can draw your own conclusions.

REBECCA

What you're saying is that this Jesus is more important to you than I am.

PHILIP

What I'm saying is that Jesus is bigger than anything we have dreamed or hoped or wanted. Rebecca, he heals lepers, gives sight to the blind, and hope for the hopeless. I even saw him bring a woman's son back to life. Rebecca, he is the Messiah. Come to Jerusalem and see for yourself.

REBECCA

No Philip. I will not take second place in our relationship. If going to Jerusalem with Jesus is more important than being with me, then there can be no future for us.

PHILIP

Rebecca, you don't understand....

REBECCA

I understand perfectly. You came here for free meals. You toyed with my affections. And now you shame me in front of my family. I hate you Philip. I hate you, and I never want to see you again.

Rebecca storms out of the room, leaving Philip standing in the room alone.

Scene 4

Pharisees Wonder about Jesus

The scene shifts to the outer court of the temple in Jerusalem where two Pharisees are engaged in conversation.

NICODEMUS

Gamaliel, my brother, Pilate has been governor of Judea for four years now. The heavy heel of Roman authority is as oppressive today as it was when he first arrived. The people are restive, and now I hear of talk about that Galilean rabbi whom some are calling the Messiah. I met him the first time he visited Jerusalem, almost three years ago.

GAMALIEL

[*Distracted*] Yes, yes, of course.... Brother Nicodemus, I share your concerns. Pilate is an annoyance. He is much too efficient in collecting Roman taxes, and there is no escaping the presence of Roman rule.... [*Sigh*] And the talk about that Galilean rabbi is equally annoying. [*He shakes his head*] Perhaps it is the Almighty's judgment on our nation that we should be tormented by Gentiles on one side and imitation Messiahs on the other side.

NICODEMUS

Then I presume you have heard talk of his coming to Jerusalem again. Perhaps if you could meet with him, as I did, it would help us understand who he is. Gamaliel, I think he's coming to Jerusalem again.

GAMALIEL

I have heard this. Many still remember his first visit to the temple. You can almost see Caiaphas counting the coins he lost when that fanatic overturned the tables of the money changers. [*He chuckles*] I think some of our brethren are terrified that it may happen again. [*Sigh*] Now, concerning this Galilean rabbi, I doubt good Nicodemus you came merely to share the gossip of the day.

NICODEMUS

There are many things I have heard—from multiple witnesses—that indicate this Jesus has fulfilled prophecies from our scriptures. [*Gamaliel is about to speak, but Nicodemus continues*] For instance, our tradition teaches that the Messiah will restore sight to the blind, make the lame walk, cleanse lepers, and raise the dead. The Prophet Isaiah wrote of these matters as well. All these things Jesus has done.

GAMALIEL

The crowds have been swayed by tricks. It's happened before; it's happening again. Jesus did unusual things, and people have simply embellished the stories. That is all.

NICODEMUS

[*Shaking his head*] There are too many witnesses for these reports to be so consistent. And how do you account for the Baptizer called John. He himself pointed to Jesus as the Son of God. Doesn't the Prophet Micah say that is exactly what Elijah would do when the Messiah came?

GAMALIEL

Yes, Elijah will do that—not a hermit named John the Baptist. Nicodemus, I'll grant you that this Jesus of Nazareth has done impressive things. He may even be a prophet of the Almighty. But ask yourself this important question: if he is the Messiah, sent by God to restore the nation of Israel and be the King of the Jews, why is Pontius Pilate still governor of Judea? Why are we paying taxes to Rome? This Jesus is a man—only a man. Someday even he will die, but Roman authority will still have its boots on our throats long after this Jesus is dead and gone. Trust me my friend, clever miracles and wise sayings do not make a messiah.

NICODEMUS

[Quietly and carefully] Maybe my brother we have been mistaken in our expectations. Maybe the restoration of Israel and the coming of our King is more than a change of our earthly government. Maybe God has something better for us—and maybe others too.

GAMALIEL

[After a pause and skeptical look] These are dangerous waters you are exploring my friend. Be careful where these thoughts may lead you. *[Looking around at the milling crowd]* Come let us go to my house for refreshment—and a much smaller crowd.

The two men exit.

Scene 5

The Disciples learn of Lazarus

JUDAS

[Munching on a basket of figs] These are pretty good figs. Peasant woman back there gave them to us for free—including the basket. I tell you Philip, by the time we get to Jerusalem (you know we're going there from Bethany) the people are going to be giving us all kinds of things: food, clothing... money.

PHILIP

Now you're excited about going to Jerusalem? A week ago you were ready to cut and run because you were afraid that following Jesus would get you arrested and killed—which is still a possibility. We all know that. *[Gesturing at the other disciples nearby]* Nothing's changed, except perhaps that the Pharisees are even angrier at Jesus and it's more dangerous. Frankly I'm surprised that you're still with us.

JUDAS

Let's just say that I weighed my options and decided that for now staying was the better choice. Hey, come on fella, cheer up. You look like you lost your best friend.

PHILIP

Maybe I did. Rebecca and her family won't have anything to do with me.

JUDAS

Rebecca? Oh that girl from Bethsaida. Too bad. Well, don't worry about it. There're plenty of fish in the sea. Listen, I've spent time in Jerusalem, and there are lots of women available. *[He slaps him on the back.]* Come on Philip, she's just one girl. Listen, something is going to happen this week—something big. I think Jesus is going to take over. When he does, we can count on rewards of our own. You can get a new girl friend. Me, well, I'm expecting something more than a few coins and free figs.

PHILIP

Judas haven't you heard what the Master's been teaching us? Don't you remember his parable about the sower and the seed that fell among the thorns?

JUDAS

He's told so many of those stories that you can't expect me to remember all of them.

PHILIP

He explained this one to us, remember. The seed is the word of God, the good news of His salvation that needs to be sown in a man's heart. In the parable, some of the seed fell among thorns and the thorns came up and choked it. Jesus said that the thorns were the worries of the world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desire for other things. Judas, can't you see that you're grasping for the thorns.

JUDAS

Look, I understand that Jesus has to accommodate a large audience. And I believe he is the one who will restore Israel's glory. All I'm saying is that there will be some residuals, and I'm looking forward to being able to buy a change of clothes and exercising some authority in keeping with my abilities and long association with Jesus. [*He offers Philip a fig.*] Fig?

Philip declines with a shake of his head.

JUDAS

Suit yourself [*and he walks over to the other apostles*].

Enter Jesus and the apostles at center stage.

JESUS

Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I go, that I may awaken him out of sleep. [*John 11:11*]

PETER

Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover.

JESUS

Lazarus is dead, and I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, so that you may believe; but let us go to him. [*John 11:14-15*]

The other apostles look at each other, a bit confused, and multiple comments follow: "Lazarus is dead, but not dead?" "We're getting close to Jerusalem: Is Jesus going there or someplace else?" "Lazarus was a good friend; I liked him."

THOMAS

[*Said to fellow disciples*] Let us also go, that we may die with him.

As they exit the stage, Philip looks quizzically as Jesus puts his arm around him and leads him off-stage.

Scene 6

Jesus raises Lazarus

A distraught Mary and Martha, surrounded by mourners, are gathered on one side of the stage.

MARTHA

[Wailing] Oh God, he is dead. Jesus did not come, and my brother Lazarus died. This is hard. This is too hard. Elias, where is He? You told Him Lazarus was sick unto death?

ELIAS

Martha, I tried—honestly, I tried. I said, “Lord, come quickly. The one you love is sick.” He even told me that Lazarus’ sickness wouldn’t end in death and would be to the glory of God. So I thought he would be right behind me on the road. I’m sorry. I’m so sorry. Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?

OFF STAGE VOICE

Jesus is here! Martha, Mary: he is here!

Martha leaps to her feet and runs to meet Jesus as he enters with his disciples from the opposite stage. She falls to his feet. A crowd begins to encircle them, including Joseph of Arimathea and Rebecca and her family.

MARTHA

Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.

JESUS

Your brother shall rise again. [John 11:23]

MARTHA

I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.

JESUS

I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me shall live even though he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this? [John 11:25-26]

MARTHA

Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world.

JESUS

Where have you laid him? [John 11:34]

MARTHA

Come and see, Lord.

As Martha guides him towards the tomb, Jesus begins to weep. By now Mary too has joined them.

JESUS

Remove the stone. [John 11:39]

MARTHA

But Lord, he has been there four days.

JESUS

Did I not say to you, if you believe, you will see the glory of God? [*As the stone is rolled away*] Father, I thank Thee that Thou hearest Me. And I knew that Thou hearest Me always; but because of the people standing around I said it, that they may believe that Thou didst send Me. Lazarus, come forth. [*John 11:40-43*]

A moment later, Lazarus comes forth. Jesus motions for men to remove the grave clothes, which they timidly and carefully do. When completed, Martha and Mary embrace their brother, who later embraces Jesus. Looking from a distance is Joseph of Arimathea.

Scene 7

Jesus scatters the Temple

JACOB

I'm telling you that I saw the Galilean rabbi leaving Jericho yesterday. He healed a blind man, and then he had a meal with Zaccheus—that creepy tax collector. They say that he raised Lazarus from his tomb. That's incredible! He's coming to Jerusalem for Passover. You should see the crowds gathered around him. I've never seen anything like it. And I don't mind adding that this could mean some brisk business in the market too.

SARAH

You're an old fool Jacob. Here we are the eve of Israel's holiest of days and all you can think about is business.

JACOB

And why not? You think Rome cares about an old Jewish festival? You think Herod cares? Even Caiaphas is looking forward to making some profit from all these pilgrims—whether it's a shepherd from Emmaus or even a Galilean rabbi. If these people want to make some money on Passover, why can't I turn a small profit too?

SARAH

Well, it is a holy day Jacob.

JACOB

Holy day or not—it's still business. Money gets what you need in life—not religion. Now hush. I hear customers—and the jingle of many purses.

A wave of people enter the stage and begin to engage in multiple business transactions, while Jesus and the apostles enter from the audience—hailed as the Messiah. Off to the side are two Pharisees and Nicodemus.

JACOB

[*Excited*] It's him. It's him. I hope he has some money—better still, I hope he's going to buy something. Just think Sarah: if he buys something from me, I can tell others that Jesus was my customer. Just think what it will do for business! Jesus shopped here. Sarah, here he comes!

Jesus approaches the assembled tables and mass of merchants and his countenance changes.

JESUS

It is written, “My house shall be called a house of prayer”; but you are making it a robbers’ den. [*Matthew 21:13*] [*He picks up a short strand of rope and begins whipping the merchants as he overturns the tables.*]

JUDAS

This is madness! You don’t win friends with this kind of behavior. What is he doing?

PHILIP

What he did three years ago: he is cleansing the temple and restoring its holiness.

Pandemonium ensues as people scatter. Two Sadducees advance on Jesus.

ISAAC

Stop this immediately. How dare you challenge what the High Priest has approved.

AARON

What miraculous sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?

JESUS

[*Controlling his anger*] Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. [*John 2:19*]

AARON

It has taken 46 years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?

ISAAC

Caiaphas must be informed about this madman. Building a temple in three days. Who does he think he is—God?

Defiant, Isaac holds his ground, but Aaron exits quickly. Nicodemus stays behind to observe Jesus and the crowd around him. Jesus, with his disciples gathered about him and listening intently to him, is suddenly approached by a small band of Pharisees and Herodians led by Aaron.

AARON

Teacher [*He says with obvious fawning*], we know you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren’t swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are. [*He pauses and smiles as he surveys the crowd drawing closer.*] Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?

JESUS

Why are you testing Me, you hypocrites? Show me the coin used for the poll-tax. [*Matthew 22:18-19*]

Isaac produces a coin and holds it above the crowd toward Jesus.

JESUS

Whose likeness and inscription is this? [*Matthew 22:20*]

ISAAC

[*With a shrug of his shoulders*] Caesar’s.

JESUS

Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and to God the things that are God's. [*Matthew 22:21*] [*And Jesus resumes his conversation with his disciples.*]

Isaac and Aaron don't understand. They shake their heads in disgust that Jesus did not provide the "correct" answer, but once again avoided the question. They walk away, with their followers in tow. Nicodemus, however, who has been observing from a distance with Joseph of Arimathea, understands. He turns to Joseph.

NICODEMUS

[*Excitedly*] Of course. Of course. Moses records in the first book of the Torah that we are made in the image of God. His imprint is on us. The coin is Caesar's creation, but we are God's creation. The coin was Caesar's, but we are God's. Therefore, we must give God what is his—we must give God ourselves. Caesar's coin is not important to God, but we are important to God because we bear his image. [*Pause*] This man is no mere prophet.

Nicodemus exits in deep thought. Joseph stays on stage pondering what he has heard.

Scene 8 Nicodemus Meets Jesus

The lights are dim. It is night. No one is on stage, except Jesus, who is seated with two of his disciples. Nicodemus enters and timidly approaches Jesus, who waves his disciples to leave.

NICODEMUS

Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him.

JESUS

Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, "You must be born again." The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit. [*John 2:5-8*]

NICODEMUS

(*Confused*) How can this be?

JESUS

(*Bemused*) Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not understand these things? Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak that which we know, and bear witness of that which we have seen; and you do not receive our witness. If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how shall you believe if I tell you heavenly things? [*John 2:10-12*]

NICODEMUS

Rabbi, (*haltingly*) I'm trying to understand. Please, please continue.

JESUS

And no one has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven, even the Son of Man. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; that whoever believes may in Him have eternal life.

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through Him. He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. [*John 2:13-18*]

NICODEMUS

But what of the Torah?

JESUS

(Still bemused, slowly shakes his head) And this is the judgment, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who practices the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God. [*John 2:19-21*]

A man enters from off-stage, carrying a small lantern. Nicodemus is startled and on his guard, but Jesus simply stares at the dark figure. The man pauses briefly, looking at Jesus and Nicodemus, before resuming his journey across the stage.

NICODEMUS

Lord, could we continue this conversation in my quarters? It is not far from here.

Jesus smiles, nods, and walks alongside Nicodemus as the two exit the stage.

Scene 9 The Sanhedrin Plots

The scene is a chamber adjacent to the temple court, where the Sanhedrin has gathered. There are multiple conversations among them—all very animated. But the group is quickly silenced when Caiaphas enters center stage.

AARON

Your Excellency, we cannot continue to suffer this Galilean rabbi to stir up the people. Pilate is in the city! If he even senses a revolt, Jerusalem will feel Rome's boot again, and I don't mind adding that we will lose our percentage of the proceeds from the Passover offering. This man must be stopped!

The Sanhedrin breaks out into a cacophony of protests, but Caiaphas calms the crowd and speaks.

CAIAPHAS

Rabbi Gamaliel, you wish to speak.

GAMALIEL

Thank you, Caiaphas. Brothers, let us remember that he is from an obscure province and that he himself is of small consequence. Look at his followers: some fishermen, a couple of farmers, a tax collector. This Jesus is unimpressive too. The entire group would have a difficult time starting a brawl in a tavern. A revolt in Jerusalem is out of the question.

ISAAC

He violates the Sabbath. He eats with tax collectors and lepers. He stirs up the rabble by calling us blind guides. He is challenging our leadership. That insignificant rabbi claims to be the Messiah!

GAMALIEL

So what? We've had other "messiahs" come—and go. Ignore this madman and his pitiful followers. This is not something that should concern us.

AARON

It must concern us! People in the countryside are claiming that he is performing miracles that only God could do. On his way here, he raised a man from a tomb after the man had been dead for four days.

ISAAC

"Reputedly" raised the man from the dead. We haven't confirmed all the facts. I doubt it actually happened.

JOSEPH

Excuse me brother, I saw it. Jesus raised a man named Lazarus from a tomb after four days.

CAIAPHAS

[In an inquisitive, but patronizing, tone] Brother Joseph, exactly what did you see?

JOSEPH

I was there when Lazarus died. I saw his family put Lazarus in the tomb, and I saw Jesus come four days later and call him from the grave. Jesus simply said, "Lazarus, come forth." And he did—still wrapped in his grave clothes.

CAIAPHAS

Of course, so what you really saw was a man come out of a tomb disguised to look like a dead Lazarus. *[Turning to Aaron and Isaac]* This is a clever ruse. We must give Jesus and his followers credit for their careful planning.

JOSEPH

No, no! It really was Lazarus. Jesus raised him from the dead. Someone removed his face cloth. I saw his face. It was Lazarus....

AARON

Or someone who looked like him. Your Excellency, I think we have a gullible member in the Sanhedrin.

ISAAC

Are you saying that Jesus is the Messiah?

JOSEPH

I think it is possible that Jesus is a prophet of God. Is he the Messiah? I do not know.

ISAAC

Are you the best that Arimathea can offer for this august body? Search the Scriptures and see that no prophet comes from Galilee—let alone the Messiah coming from such a place.

Isaac and Aaron shrug their shoulders and step away from Joseph, while others in the assembly start mumbling.

CAIAPHAS

Silence. Brother Gamaliel, I appreciate your insight, and under normal circumstances I would concur, but I have heard too much about this Jesus to believe that he poses no threat to our nation. I have heard rumors that he has violated the Sabbath by healing people, that he has touched lepers, that he has socialized with sinners and Gentiles, and that he has challenged our authority. He is violating God's law and leading the people astray. He must be stopped.

NICODEMUS

But don't our laws allow a man to receive a hearing before he is condemned? Perhaps, if we could only bring Jesus here for an interview, we might clarify some misunderstandings.

AARON

And what of Pilate? What if he thinks we're conspiring with this madman by meeting with him? Brothers, we must do something, or we will lose our position and our nation.

NICODEMUS

But, brothers, he is one of us. We must....

Nicodemus tries to speak, but the others crowd around him and force him to the outer circle, where eventually he and Joseph of Arimathea are left standing alone.

CAIAPHAS

You know nothing at all! You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish. Brother Gamaliel, would you agree?

GAMALIEL

Yes. I think that is a reasonable proposal.

CAIAPHAS

What say the rest of you?

A chorus of affirmations follow as another rabbi enters and whispers a message to Caiaphas.

CAIAPHAS

Nicodemus, Joseph: you are excused. [*Pause as Nicodemus and Joseph exit*] My brothers, we are in luck. I have been told that Pontus Pilate has agreed to hold an immediate hearing tomorrow morning concerning a threat to the security of our nation, and Rabbi Jacob has been approached by one of Jesus' disciples who is willing to betray his master for the right price.

Judas Iscariot enters, escorted by Rabbi Jacob.

JACOB

Your Excellency, allow me to introduce Judas Iscariot.

Aaron walks up beside Caiaphas, holding a bag of coins.

Intermission

ACT II

SCENE 1 THE LAST SUPPER

The scene is the upper room. Assembled around the table are the twelve disciples and Jesus. The disciples are engaged in casual banter amongst themselves and eating when Jesus speaks.

JESUS

Truly, I say to you that one of you will betray Me—one who is eating with Me. [Mark 14:18]

All (but one) are surprised and multiple responses follow: “Not I”; “Surely not me”; “No Lord, not I.”

JESUS

It is one of the twelve, one who dips with Me in the bowl. For the Son of Man is to go, just as it is written of Him; but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born. [Mark 14:20-21]

JUDAS

[*Eating heartily, he responds with indifference.*] Surely not I Rabbi?

There is a pause before Jesus responds with visible sorrow—almost tearfully.

JESUS

What you are about to do, do quickly. [John 13:27]

Judas casually rises and walks away.

PHILIP

Where is he going?

MATTHEW

Hey, it's Judas. He probably wants to get some more food. He'll be back.

JESUS

[*Raising a large piece of bread, Jesus prays silently (since we cannot determine exactly what he prayed). He breaks the bread and passes it to his disciples.*] Take, eat; this is My body. [*Raising a large cup*] Drink from it, all of you; for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins. But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom. [Matthew 26:26-29]

A hymn follows.

The scene shifts to where Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus are engaged in conversation.

JOSEPH

Brother Nicodemus, what do you think: is this Jesus a madman—another false messiah—or a prophet? I want to believe him; his miracles, his words are so persuasive. But the others on the Sanhedrin call him dangerous. How could so many of them, and the High Priest Caiaphas, be so wrong?

NICODEMUS

Joseph, I talked to Jesus only two nights ago. I realize now that God loves us—not because we follow the Torah, but because we are his children. It is not who we are or what we do that reconciles us with him, but it is only through our faith in him and by his grace that we can be called his children.

JOSEPH

This is truly a new teaching, rabbi.

NICODEMUS

It is only new because we never understood it before. Joseph, he walked me through the Law, the Writings, and the Prophets and showed me that this was always God's plan.

JOSEPH

If this is so, then this Jesus must be even greater than a prophet. [Pause]

NICODEMUS

He is the Son of Man.

JOSEPH

The Son of God.

[They look at each other and speak concurrently with astonishment]

NICODEMUS AND JOSEPH

The Messiah.

SCENE 2 IN THE GARDEN, HIS ARREST

Jesus enters, with Peter, John, and James following. Jesus motions for the three to wait as he moves further away from them and kneels in prayer. Moments later he rises and returns to the disciples in time for a large group to enter the opposite stage. Judas quickly steps forward, pauses briefly, and then embraces Jesus, concurrently giving him a kiss on the cheek. The crowd surges forward: some grab Jesus and begin to push him off stage, the others move towards the three disciples, who quickly run away.

SCENE 3
JESUS BEFORE PILATE

The crowd is gathering center stage, while Pilate is seated in a prominent location at stage left/right; Julius is standing nearby. A guard enters, salutes, and waits at attention for permission to speak.

PILATE

Yes, what is it.

GUARD

My Lord, Herod has sent the prisoner Jesus back to you.

Pilate, perturbed, stops what he's doing and gives the guard his attention.

PILATE

Don't I have enough to do already? I don't have time to deal with such trivialities. Jesus is from Galilee, which is Herod's jurisdiction. What reason does Herod give for sending the man back to me?

Guard hands Pilate a scroll

GUARD

Sir, he said to give you this if you asked.

Pilate takes the scroll, reads, and then laughs.

PILATE

I did not know that Herod had such a sense of humor. Perhaps it will be worth taking a few hours to get to know him a little better. *[Pause and a sigh]* Let's get this over with. I'm going back to Caesarea in three days, and this affair is not going to linger any longer than necessary.

JULIUS

Prefect, this is all highly irregular—and suspicious. Why would these Jewish leaders betray one of their own kinsmen to Roman authority, and on such short notice too?

PILATE

I am weary of your counsel centurion. Once again, you seem to forget your place: I am governor of this province, and I will do what is necessary to maintain Roman authority. Do you understand?

Disgusted, Pilate talks past the centurion at a guard.

PILATE

You, bring the prisoner here. And you summon his accusers. It's time to settle this.

Julius leaves the stage briefly as Jesus is brought in chained and beaten.

PILATE

I was told that this was a sensitive security matter affecting this province and the empire. It's really only a matter of personal spite. [*Looks up at Jesus*] They want you dead, and they want Rome to do the killing for them. [*He rises and starts pacing.*] They tell me you claim to be a king. Well, are you the king of the Jews?

JESUS

Are you saying this of your own initiative, or did others tell you about Me? [*John 18:34*]

PILATE

I'm not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and priests delivered you to me! Riddles are not your best defense. What have you really done?

JESUS

My Kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting, that I might not be delivered up to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm. [*John 18:36*]

PILATE

So you are a king?

JESUS

You say correctly that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice. [*John 18:37*]

PILATE

[*Pilate raises his hand to stop Jesus from speaking further.*] What is truth?

By this time the crowd has gathered with the chief priests and Pharisees at the front. Pilate addresses them.

PILATE

You brought this man to me as one who incites the people to rebellion, but having examined him I find no guilt in him regarding the charges you made against him. I will therefore punish him and release him.

A cacophony of protests erupt from the crowd: "Away with him!" "Crucify him!" With effort, Pilate quiets the crowd.

PILATE

Why, what evil has the man done? Take him and crucify him yourselves. I have found no guilt in him that requires the sentence of death.

ISAAC

We have a law, and by that law he ought to die because he made himself out to be the Son of God.

Rattled, Pilate turns to face Jesus again.

PILATE

Where are you from?

Jesus doesn't answer.

PILATE

You refuse to speak to me? Don't you know that I have the authority to release you or to crucify you?

JESUS

You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above; for this reason he who delivered Me up to you has the greater sin. [*John 19:11*]

For a moment, Pilate stares at Jesus, frozen in thought. The crowd begins murmuring again, and the calls for Barabbas get louder.

PILATE

If I give you the murderer Barabbas, What shall I do then with Jesus who is called Christ?

Led by the priests, the crowd shouts back: "Crucify him!"

PILATE

[*Tauntingly*] Shall I crucify your king?

AARON

[*Speaking above the murmuring crowd*] We have no king but Caesar!

Someone in the crowd yells out: "Crucify him!"

PILATE

Why? What crime has he committed?

AARON

If you let this man go free, you are no friend of Caesar. Any man who claims to be a king is an enemy of Caesar.

[Pilate looks struck, as though he sees his vulnerability.]

JULIUS

[*Said to Pilate*] My Lord, this is about to turn into riot. The emperor will not be pleased.

PILATE

I will not jeopardize my career and my future for a Jewish rabbi.

Angry, Pilate holds up his hands to the crowd and shouts authoritatively.

PILATE

Enough! I release Barabbas. I condemn Jesus to the cross. We have two crucifixions scheduled today. Let's make it three.

He washes his hands in a basin, snaps his fingers for Julius to bring the towel. As he dries his hands, Pilate speaks to Julius.

PILATE

Julius, you will supervise the executions. It will be your last duty on my staff. Tomorrow you will return to your cohort in Caesarea. Leave my sight, and take Jesus with you. [*Turning to Aaron and the others around him*] Jesus will be crucified this morning.

The crowd cheers as Jesus is led away.

SCENE 4
ELI'S REMORSE

After the crowd disperses, only Eli, Rachel, Rebecca, and Samuel are left on stage.

RACHEL

Eli what is going on? Wasn't that Philip's Rabbi?

ELI

Yes, it was.

SAMUEL

Papa, I don't understand. Why were the people so angry and why are they so happy now?

ELI

They got what they wanted. May God forgive us.

RACHEL

Eli, what are you saying?

ELI

This was wrong. I don't know who this Jesus is, but we should not have been so quick to condemn him—or surrender him to the Romans. What have we done?

REBECCA

[*Panicked*] Papa, what about Philip? What happened to Philip? He was with Jesus. What if they took him too?

ELI

I don't know Rebecca. I didn't see him anywhere here. Perhaps he got wind of the arrest and got away before they came for his Rabbi.

REBECCA

He wouldn't do that. You know he wouldn't do that. What if they have him in prison? We have to find out. We have to look for him.

ELI

No. There is nothing that we can do—not now. It's too dangerous. Later perhaps when things have calmed down: maybe then we could help him. [*Pause*] Rebecca, I was too harsh on Philip. If you see him, tell him I am sorry—for what I have said and for the loss of his teacher. I'm sorry.

They exit the stage.

SCENE 5 THE CRUCIFIXION

This is the crucifixion scene. A small crowd assembles on stage, while others approach from multiple directions. Jesus, carrying his cross, is led down an aisle to the stage, with the Centurion Julius leading the procession. Also appearing on the stage as the Roman soldiers prepare Jesus for crucifixion are Nicodemus, Eli and Rachel, and Aaron and Isaac.

JESUS

Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing. [*Luke 23:34*]

JULIUS

[*Thoughtfully amazed*] What an unusual thing for a condemned man to say.

JESUS

My God, My God; why hast Thou forsaken me? [*Matthew 27:46*]

ISAAC

He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, the Chosen One.

AARON

If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself!

THIEF ONE

[*Squirming violently, he speaks first at the nearby soldiers and then to Jesus*] You swine! Pig-eating Gentiles, burn in Hades for all I care. And you, aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!

THIEF TWO

Don't you fear God since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.

A soldier slaps him, and Thief Two whimpers.

THIEF TWO

Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.

JESUS

Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise. [*Luke 23:43*]

JESUS

Father, into Thy hands I commit My spirit. [*Luke 23:46*]
It is finished! [*John 19:30*]

JULIUS

Surely this was a righteous man, even the Son of God!

A soldier breaks the legs of the two thieves, while a second soldier pierces the side of Jesus. A moment later, Joseph and two servants carrying a stretcher enter; Joseph presents a document to Julius, who nods and motions for the body to be delivered to Joseph and his servants. Nicodemus steps forward to help carry the body of Jesus off stage. And the crowd disperses.

SCENE 6 CONSEQUENCES

The entrance to the Temple. It is pre-dawn morning, Sunday. Philip comes from one of the wings as a distraught Judas Iscariot comes out of the temple door. Then he turns and throws the money back in. Then he turns and sees Philip.

JUDAS

Philip.

PHILIP

[*Emotionally tense; tearfully*] Judas, I thought you'd be here. How could you have done it?

JUDAS

I didn't think they'd condemn him. I didn't think he'd let them kill him. I thought he was taking too much time. I was tired of waiting. It was time to act. Three years, Philip, three years, I—we—couldn't let this opportunity slip away.

PHILIP

He was our friend, our Master, the Messiah. How could you betray him—and for what, a few coins, the approval of the High Priest? Oh Judas, what have you done?

JUDAS

No more! No more! I can't stand it.

PHILIP

How can you live with what you've done?

JUDAS

I can't. [*He sees the rope on the ground.*] I won't.

He picks the rope up and runs off.

Rebecca enters from the opposite side of the stage, sees Philip and runs to him.

REBECCA

Philip, Oh Philip. I was so worried about you. I'm so sorry. I'm sorry for your friend Jesus. I'm sorry for the things I said to you last week. Momma and Papa are sorry too. We are returning to Bethsaida tomorrow morning. Your rabbi is dead. There's nothing more for you here. Would you like to come with us?

Philip shakes his head negatively, still obviously downcast and alone.

REBECCA

Philip, it's not too late for us. Father has calmed down, and he's very sorry about your friend. I think it was very nice of you to be so loyal to your friend, but it's over. You have to rebuild your life. Philip, come back with us.

PHILIP

Thank you, Rebecca, but no. I can't explain it. I know that Jesus is dead, but for reasons I cannot explain, I feel I should stay here. I can't go back to Bethsaida. I must stay here. I know it's not safe, and yet, there's something that tells me to stay here. I think I should be with my friends.

REBECCA

Philip, I know where your friends are. They're staying in an upper room not far from here.

PHILIP

[Slowly rising, he sighs.] I know the place. I will go there.

REBECCA

Goodbye, Philip.

Philip shrugs and nods an affirmation as he starts to walk off stage. Rebecca goes in the opposite direction. As they leave the stage, Nicodemus appears from the opposite side, walking towards the entrance. But he is suddenly met by Caiaphas, Aaron, and a temple guard at the entrance.

CAIAPHAS

There is no reason for you to come here Nicodemus. The Council of Elders has determined that you are not welcome here or in our assembly. We have taken the same action with Joseph of Arimathea. Friends of Jesus are not our friends. Your seat on the Sanhedrin has been given to someone more worthy.

Aaron steps forward and roughly removes the headdress of Nicodemus, dropping it on the ground.

AARON

Your actions were shameful, and your presence here is repulsive. Leave us Nicodemus *[He says with harshness]*. Leave Jerusalem forever.

Aaron and Caiaphas exit, but the guard blocks the entrance, leaving Nicodemus nowhere to go but in the opposite direction of Aaron and Caiaphas.

SCENE 7 PILATE'S FATE

Pilate is seated on his throne reviewing a scroll, and Julia is nearby, but not engaged. She is, however, listening though. His new Centurion enters as the lights come up within Pilate's peripheral vision.

PILATE

So Centurion, what report have you of the city?

ALEXANDER

Sir, there are still reports of unrest in the streets. Yesterday's earthquake caused a good deal of damage near the Jewish temple and their main cemetery. The people seem to be unnerved by that crucifixion yesterday as well. [*Pilate seems preoccupied.*] There is increasing talk of some sort of connection between those crucifixions and the earthquake. The Pharisee leaders are trying to calm everyone, but with little effect... . Sir?

PILATE

[*Distracted*] Right, thank you. That will be all for now. [*Beat*] No, wait. The Pharisees were supposed to control all this, but it seems that they have much less control than they thought. There can be no connection between those two events. The people will understand that in time. Perhaps the point of a spear will help convince them. Prepare the guard to clear the streets.

ALEXANDER

Very well, sir. They are ready at your command. [*Salutes and departs.*]

PILATE

[*Under his breath*] Unbelievable....simply unbelievable.

JULIA

[*Now engaging*] How so husband? What is unbelievable?

PILATE

The crucifixion of that Jewish messiah, Jesus: it was supposed to prevent a riot, not cause one! These people are going to be my undoing. The crucifixions, sudden darkness, and earthquake were all just coincidences. Unreal. Tiberius will hold me accountable for this disturbance, no doubt, but what more could I do? Jesus' death is on them—the Jews! And if the gods send an earthquake, that can't be laid on me either. This is not my fault! I did everything that I was supposed to do: keep order, punish those who disturb the peace. I even worked with that idiot King Herod. And all of this is because of that one man, Jesus.

JULIA

I tried to send word to you about my dream—that you should have nothing to do with that Jesus—that He would be nothing but trouble....

And what if you were recalled? Would that be so bad? At least we'd be out of this place.

PILATE

[*Incredulous*] You don't know what you're saying.... [*Now lost in his thoughts*] Of course it would be the end of my career if Caesar recalled me, especially if they thought I couldn't control one Jewish rabbi. We'd be back

in Rome alright—disgraced.

And it would all be because of that Jesus. We posted a guard at his tomb, like the Jews wanted, to disprove the prophecy about him rising from the dead after three days. [*Beat*] Now, if He will just *stay dead*, we might get through all this. The people will calm down, everyone will forget about the events of this week, tax receipts should be in soon. Tiberius will be happy. But there will be no hope for us here if something else happens. [*Musing aloud*] But why? That Jesus did nothing worthy of death, I absolved Rome of any complicity in His death, and the Jews all yelled “Let it be on us and our children!” The fools! I did what the emperor wanted done: I kept order in the province, and I stopped their messiah. [*Beat, deflated and collapsing into his throne*] But Rome will still blame me—and all because of one man. Perhaps I’m the real fool here.

SCENE 8 JESUS IS ALIVE

Mourners assemble around the tomb. Two angels roll away the stone, and Jesus appears. After his happy reception at the upper stage center, Jesus moves down stage to his assembled disciples and others in attendance in the upper room, where he is joyously received.

PHILIP

[*Speaking toward the Lord Jesus, but more generally directed to all present.*] Is this the end?

Before anyone else can respond, Nicodemus steps forward.

NICODEMUS

The end? Oh no, my friend, this is only the beginning.

THE END