

Crucify Him!

By

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Theme:

This play conveys the cruelty of the crucifixion. I believe that the knowledge of what Christ actually went through in order to pay for our salvation creates a powerful image of our Lord and Savior that most of us have either forgotten or have never seen.

Biblical Reference:

The crucifixion of Christ which is described in:

Matthew 27
Mark 15
Luke 23
John 18 & 19

Approximate Running Time:

15 minutes

Props:

Rags that represent Jesus' clothes.
Small stones that can be used as gambling pieces.

Cast of Characters:

Jezeze: Jezeze is an experienced Roman soldier. He has taken part in many crucifixions in minor capacities. The crucifixion of Christ was his first opportunity to take part in the actual crucifixion of a criminal. He is relating his story to David, a new Roman recruit.

David: David is a new Roman recruit. He is young, inexperienced, and should appear to be shy and gentle. His reaction to the things that Jezeze tells him should be an attempt to be brave and manly, but yet show that he is still timid regarding his future role in the punishment of criminals.

Notes:

This play was written to be performed around Easter time. It takes place on Good Friday, at the foot of the cross of Christ.

Period costuming will enhance the powerful imagery which this play attempts to convey, but no set is needed.

Some of the actions which are detailed are enhanced by miming the actions as the actor is narrating them, i.e. the scourging pole and the fisticuffs.

Jezere's storytelling should contain much emotion, as if being told by someone who really enjoys what he does for a living, both for the sake of telling a good story and for scaring David into understanding what it is like to be a Roman soldier.

This play is greatly enhanced if it is followed by "I Believed in Him," and "He is Risen!"

Scene:

Jezere and David are sitting at the foot of the cross gambling for the clothes of Christ. David begins to ask questions about how Jesus got into that position.

David: Hey Jezere, can I ask you a question?

Jezere: Sure. What is it kid?

David: How did He get into that position?

Jezere: Are you asking me what He did to deserve to die?

David: No. I'm asking what exactly you guys did to Him to make Him look like that. [*Pointing towards His beaten body.*]

Jezere: You don't know what happens to criminals?

David: No. I mean, I've seen criminals on crosses before, but I've never taken part in what happens before they hang to die. Remember, I'm new around here, I haven't had the chance to take part in an execution yet, and I'm kind'a curious as to what happens.

Jezere: You've seen criminals hanging on a cross, but you've never seen an execution before?

David: No. My mother never allowed me to watch what she called the 'Brutality of man.'

Jezere: Well then, [*looking forward to the opportunity to tell him all about how it's done*], let me fill you in on how we Romans punish a criminal for the crime that he's committed. I'll use this [*pointing towards Jesus*] criminal as an example.

David: OK. And, could you start from the beginning, 'cause I don't know much about why he's here [*pointing*] either.

Jezere: You know that Pilate had sent Him to Herod to be sentenced for blasphemy and that Herod let Pilate choose His punishment.

David: Yeah, but that's about all I know.

Jezere: Well, that morning I was on duty when He arrived from Herod. He looked tired and beaten as He was set out in front us soldiers and the others in the crowd that had gathered. Are you sure you don't know about this?

David: I haven't heard it. I swear.

Jezere: OK. Well, Pilate offered to free the criminal as his traditional Passover offering to the people. There was some murmuring from the crowd and then some of the men began shouting for Barabbas instead. "What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called Christ?" Pilate asked the crowd. The crowd yelled, "Crucify Him!" I heard Pilate attempt to reason with them, but he soon realized that the crowd was too loud for him to speak over. I watched the few men who had begun the shouts for the release of Barabbas as they looked around, waving their arms up and down, encouraging all to join them in their plea for crucifixion. Small groups of the crowd began to shout along with them, and then more groups joined in, and more, and more. The chant started to pick up momentum until it seemed as if the entire crowd joined in the plea for the crucifixion of Jesus.

David: The whole crowd called for the crucifixion of Jesus? How many were there?

Jezere: Hundreds.

David: I bet you were scared.

Jezere: Not to tell a lie, I was scared. I didn't want to have to deal with a riot. I turned to look at Pilate. He began to look scared too. The shouting had become very loud, and the emotion of the crowd kept it going until it seemed that it would never lose any of its momentum.

Then Pilate threw up his hands in indecision and began to pace as the crowd continued to chant and shout. Then he quieted them down again as he reached for a basin of water. "I am innocent of this man's blood," he said. "It is your responsibility!" A great cheer rose from the crowd in anticipation of His crucifixion. [*End this statement with a note of finality, as if it was the end of the story.*]

David: So that's how He got where He is now?

Jezere: No, that's just the beginning of how He got where He is now. Some of us guards dragged Him down from the platform and led Him away to be beaten. The crowd followed us to the square to see the scourging.

David: What's a scourging?

Jezere: Boy, you don't know nothin' do ya?

David: Sorry. I just thought this would be a good time to ask.

Jezere: You're right, no, you're right. You'll find out sooner or later and you're probably better off findin' out from me than having to take part without knowing what's gonna' happen. [*He begins to act the scene out in a harsh manner to get the cruelty of the execution across to David as if he's really proud of his work.*] Well, as soon as we arrived at the scourging pole the rope was tied around His wrists and pulled tight. Then the other end of the rope was thrown through the ring at the top of the pole. The slack was taken out until only the tips of His toes were touching the cobble stone below. Our commander came forward to inspect the prisoner's back, making sure that His skin was tight. He then reached for his whip. Our commander let the whip dangle behind him as he called out curses at the prisoner. We all shouted curses and insults at Him. Then we all cheered as the commander stood poised to lash out with the whip, the cheers getting louder as the ends of the whip wrapped around the body of this man. The pottery and stones dug deep into His flesh. When the whip was recoiled, deep grooves of His flesh were dug out of His back, opening paths for blood to flow. The commander's arm came down time and time again as we cheered him on. Each time the elements dug deeper into the flesh and muscle and veins of the prisoner's back and side. He was beaten until there was nothing left to beat. There wasn't a spot on His back or side that wasn't channeling blood down to His feet.

David: Ugh. What happens when there isn't anything on His back left to beat?

Jezeree: Well, it was obvious that continuing the flogging was pointless. If there isn't any skin left on His back there's nothing left to whip. We wouldn't want to kill Him before we had a chance to crucify him. He was then let down from the pole and led into the palace grounds where only us soldiers were allowed to follow. A couple of other soldiers had fetched a purple robe, which was wrapped around Him before He was placed on a chair. His hands were tied to the chair as another soldier brought out a crown made of old thorns - they were hard as nails. The commander gently placed it upon the man's head, then he pressed it down firmly, causing streams of blood to trickle down His face. The commander then announced 'Here sits the king of the Jews, let us all pay Him His due respect.' He then bowed down low before Him, rose, and struck Him square in the jaw with his right fist, cursed Him, and stood aside so that we could do the same. We all followed suit, some spitting on Him, some pounding the thorns deeper into His head, some hitting Him with a staff.

David: Did you hit Him too?

Jezere: I'd take any opportunity given me to hit a criminal. You bet I hit him. I bowed down low before thrusting my fist into His bloody face as the rest laughed and cheered me on.

David: What happened after you all beat him?

Jezere: I tell ya, it was hard to discern the features of His face after we had all taken our turn. His eyes were black and swollen, His nose bleeding in many places, His lips enlarged and bleeding. He remained conscience through all that we did to Him, never crying out or moving to stop anything that we did. Before I knew it, the commander announced that it was time for us to get on with the actual crucifixion. The prisoner was ordered to stand up and the robe was stripped off of His back, causing all of the wounds to open again, as He was forced to walk out into the hot afternoon sun. [*Breaking from his story to ask David a question.*] Have you ever stood along the road as a procession of criminals passed by?

David: Only once. But that was when I was a lot younger.

Jezeree: Well, I had known that there were two thieves already scheduled to be crucified. This Jesus was added to the two already scheduled and the three criminals were made to carry the cross beams of their crosses up through the village to the hill where the crucifixions take place. The other two had little problem doing this, but this Jesus was struggling under the weight of His beam. His arms were raw from the scourging, His face was dripping with fresh blood, and His back was crusted with the blood that had dried there. He began to collapse from exhaustion, stumbling first, then dropping to His knees. Each time a soldier was quick to demand that He rise and continue forward, not allowing Him any time to rest. Then it all became too much for Him and He just fell in a heap there upon the ground. He lay there with the dirt sifting into His wounds, the cross beam pressing His face into the ground, as the soldier demanded that He get up and continue walking.

My company had been ordered to go ahead of the procession to clear the way for them. At times we had to physically push the crowd back away from the road. I had stayed at a particular section where the crowd was especially difficult to handle. I turned my back to the crowd, still holding my arms out, and leaning back against them to hold them in place. It was hard for me to hold my position as I saw the procession passing by me. I turned my head just in time to see Him fall for the last time. The soldier following Him cursed Him, kicked Him, and told Him to get up, but there was nothing that he could do that would get the prisoner moving again. The soldier, not knowing what else to do, looked around, pointed right at one of the men who I was attempting to hold back and said, "You, come here." As I moved to one side to let the man pass through into the road I was able to see what effect the hot sun was having on this criminal. He lay there in the street, His face in the dirt, His sides barely moving as He struggled for breath, physically unable to get to His feet. I can remember feeling a sense of satisfaction, of pride for a job well done. This man was definitely paying for all that He was guilty of.

David: Why did the soldier order the man out into the street?

Jezere: To carry the criminal's cross. The procession, having added another member, made its way to the foot of Golgotha. I could see that the criminals realized that this was the place where they were to die. I had never taken part in actually placing a criminal up on a cross before. Up until then I had only been a part of crowd control. I wanted to remember my first crucifixion, so I took careful mental notes of the entire scene, memorizing every movement. I could not have wished for a better first assignment, for it was my team who were to place this Jesus on His cross. I'll never forget what took place. First, we laid the cross beam that the criminal had carried over the main support beam, making sure that the notches in the wood were properly aligned. Then we tied the two beams together with rope. The cross itself was complete. We ripped every shred of clothing from the criminal's body, grabbed Him by His arms and feet, and laid Him out across the wood. We placed His left arm down, forced His hand open, and one of us placed their heel down onto the criminal's wrist. Then I reached for the mallet and stake to secure the criminal to the wood.

David: That must'a been tough, watching Him react to the pain of the hammer and nail.

Jezere: Yeah, it was, but you get used to it. His body convulsed in pain as the nails went through the palms of His hand. We did the same thing to His right arm and only His feet were left to secure. They were folded one on top of the other and one nail was driven through them both. Now He was securely anchored to the cross.

It took four of us to pick up the cross with Him lying on it and drop it into the hole in the ground. I stood back a few steps to watch Him hang there. He was naked, bruised, bleeding, dying, on that cross. Someone from the crowd behind me began to hurl more insults at Him as He hung there. "Save yourself, King of the Jews." Another added, "Let's see some miracles now!"

David: Did you stand there satisfied with the work that you had done, or were you beginning to feel some pity for him?

Jezere: It was tough. I felt my own breath leave me as I watched Him lift himself up on His feet to breathe only one breath of air and then collapse down onto His wrists again. I could see how much pain He was in and I knew that we had done our job properly. I stood there watching the criminal die until you came on shift and started to ask me all of these questions.

David: So that's it?

Jezere: That's it. Until the next time we've got to crucify the criminals.

David: And when will that be?

Jezere: That all depends. It could be next week or next month. Whenever the next criminal is given a death sentence, it's up to us to carry that sentence out.

David: Would you do it again?


Jezere: I sure would. And so will you. It's part of your job now. You should consider it a privilege to be able to take part in the execution of a criminal. They get exactly what they deserve.

David: I just wonder if what was said about Him was true, if He didn't get what He deserved.

Jezere: That's not for me to decide. I'm just doing my job. And it'll be your job soon, too, so you have to put it out of your mind. [*Pointing towards the rags at His feet.*] So are we gonna' finish our little game here or what?

[The two silently gamble a bit, Jezere wins, takes the clothes, and walks away, motioning for David to follow him. David begins to walk away and turns back to look at Christ again. Jezere calls out to him and David leaves the cross and exits at Jezere's side.]

- CURTAIN -



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