

Mizpah

CHARACTERS: 2, one voice of Jesus

COSTUMES: Biblical

PROPS: Three crosses

SETTING: Israel around the time of Christ

RUN TIME: 14 minutes

FK reading level: 4.2

Scene opens with an empty stage. DEXIOS enters stage right. Spotlight up on DEXIOS.

DEXIOS: *(to audience)* I was a Zealot during the Roman occupation of Israel. The Romans had killed my father, reduced my mother to a sorrowful husk of her former self and oppressed us. The instant I was old enough, I joined the growing number of Zealots. I intended to bring freedom to my people.

EHUD quietly enters and stands in darkness.

DEXIOS: *(Nodding toward EHUD: shrouded in darkness.)* He was my brother in all but blood. Ehud Aristeros, Ehud the left handed. When I joined the Zealots they made him my mentor. He took the role seriously, teaching me, helping me. He was the father I never had. I loved him as I loved myself.

Lights up on both men. They cross to each other.

EHUD: We are now comrades in faith, comrades in arms. I cannot replace your father but know that if you have need of me, I will be here. *(Clasps his hand)*

DEXIOS: *(adding his other hand to the hand clasp)* And I for you. You are my brother.

EHUD: As Laban said to Jacob, May the LORD keep watch between you and me when we are separated *(DEXIOS joins in)* from each other. *(They embrace. DEXIOS moves a bit away, spot only on DEXIOS)*

DEXIOS: *(to audience)* Dexios and I were one in spirit and purpose. We worked side by side as day laborers and tirelessly for the restoration of the kingdom to Israel. Throughout our history we had been enslaved by the Egyptians, oppressed by the Midianites, Philistines and taken captive by the Assyrians and Babylonians. But always God had come to our rescue and delivered us by the heroes of old, by Saul and Jonathan, by Deborah and Barak, by Ezra and

Nehemiah. God would raise up a Messiah who would deliver us from the Romans. And I was convinced the time of our freedom was at hand. (*Lights up on both*)

DEXIOS: (*excited*) The most extraordinary thing happened today.

EHUD: What? (*Sarcastically*) The Roman's decided to get out of our country?

DEXIOS: (*earnestly*) No, listen. I went with Simon to the Jordan River to hear the prophet John speak. This man came out of the crowds and was baptized.

EHUD: (*Dismissing him with a wave of the hand*) What's new about that? You've been baptized. Simon has been baptized. Hundreds of people have been baptized by this John.

DEXIOS: This is different. (*taking a deep breath*) Let me start from the beginning. John was preaching. He said, get this, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. The axe is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire."

EHUD: Good for him. We need talk that will stir the people to action.

DEXIOS: (*continuing the story*) What should we do then?" the crowd asked.

John answered, "The man with two tunics should share with him who has none, and the one who has food should do the same."

Tax collectors also came to be baptized. "Teacher," they asked, "what should we do?"

Don't collect any more than you are required to," he told them.

EHUD: (*grunting in disgust*) Like those pigs in league with the Romans are going to give up a chance to line their own pockets. Fat chance. They have betrayed their own brothers by collecting for the (*spits*) Romans.

DEXIOS: Speaking of which. Some Roman soldiers were there. They asked him, "And what should we do?" John replied, "Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely—be content with your pay."

EHUD: It is more likely to rain silver coins than for those Roman dogs to be content with their pay.

DEXIOS: Then a man stepped out of the crowd. John saw him coming and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! The reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel."

The man wanted John to baptize him but John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"

Jesus that is his name, replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented.

(Growing more excited and joyful) As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. *(Vividly reliving the event)* At that moment heaven was opened, and we saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

EHUD: *(Catching the excitement)* Could it be! The Messiah! *(Grabs DEXIOS and begins hugging him, jumping with him and is given over to ecstasy)* The Messiah is here! He will deliver us from these Romans and set up a kingdom more glorious than that of David or Solomon. Praise be to God. Where can I meet this savior of our people?

DEXIOS: I don't know. We'll ask Simon.

EHUD: Praise God. The Christ has come! I must go tell the others. *(clasping his arms)* The Lord watch between you and me....

DEXIOS: When we are separated from each other.

Lights out. After a few beats spotlight on EHUD.

EHUD: *(to audience)* It was over a month before this Jesus reappeared. He began teaching in synagogues but also on mountainsides, from a boat and in people's homes. I should not have gotten my hopes up after I heard him the first time. But I did and I was disappointed. *(Lights up on both. to DEXIOS, accusingly)* Did you hear him?

DEXIOS: I did. I was there.

EHUD: (*disgusted*) That Jesus said "If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles." You know what that's about, don't you? Co-operation with the (*spits*) Romans. It is Roman law that allows them to force us to carry their packs for a mile. Now this Jesus is saying "Go a second mile!" Preposterous!

DEXIOS: But don't you see? If we go a second mile, they aren't the ones controlling us. It makes it our decision, not theirs.

EHUD: Nonsense. It's co-operation with the enemy. When you joined the Zealots you knew we had one goal in mind - freedom for all of Israel. And we won't get free co-operating with the Roman dogs.

DEXIOS: But even Simon had joined him. He is one of the 12, they say.

EHUD: And that good-for-nothing louse Matthew the tax collector is one of the 12 as well. That doesn't say much for a group that admits tax collectors.

DEXIOS: I've never heard anyone who teaches like this Jesus.

EHUD: I think you'll be disappointed if you're expecting him to bring Israel into her own.

DEXIOS: I have to go. (*bows*) May the Lord watch between you and I ... (*bows*)

EHUD: (*voice changes and is kindly*) When we are separated from each other.

Lights out. After a few beats spotlight comes up on EHUD

EHUD: The Romans continued to occupy our homeland, creating a Gentile stench everywhere they went. This Jesus even helped them. (*Lights up on both, To DEXIOS*) You saw what he did. He healed that centurion's servant. What kind of Messiah works with the enemy?

DEXIOS: The servant was a Jew.

EHUD: (*Snorts and changes the topic*) Did you hear what Pilate did in Galilee? (*DEXIOS shakes head "no"*) He mixed the blood of some Galileans in with their sacrifice. And when we brought it to Jesus' attention all he could say is "Do you think they were worse sinners than others"

DEXIOS: So? What was wrong with that?

EHUD: It was a perfect opportunity to whip up some nationalism, some fury at the Roman pigs. It was time to start talking about revolt for all the injustices.

DEXIOS: I don't know. Maybe armed revolution isn't the way.

EHUD: (*incredulous*) Did I hear you right? Are you becoming a cowardly pacifist? If we want Israel for the Israelites, we need to do more than turn the other cheek. Did your ancestor Judas Maccabeus turn the other cheek when Antiochus offered sacrifices to Zeus in the temple?

DEXIOS: No. he and his brothers took up arms against the tyrants.

EHUD: And Ehud, my namesake, the left handed judge, did he hold back when Eglon of Moab was extorting tribute from the Children of Israel?

DEXIOS: No.

EHUD: That's right. He strapped a short sword under his clothes and assassinated the barbarian and freed his people. Do I have to remind you of Gideon, Samuel and David?

DEXIOS: No. I know their histories like I know my own. And I admire them for their courage and sacrifices for our people. But Jesus is a son of David. He rode into Jerusalem on a donkey just as the prophets said he would. He could be the Messiah!

EHUD: Listen, we'll find out his true colors tomorrow. Some of the teachers of the law will pose a question to him. We'll know once and for all by his answer. Tomorrow.

DEXIOS: Tomorrow. The Lord watch between you and me...

EHUD: When we are separated from each other.

(Lights out. After a few beats spotlight on EHUD. To audience)

EHUD: Passover was coming. It was time for action. We had a plan to strike at the Roman pigs. We would do what we could to thwart them. With God's help we would steal some very valuable records. It was a small step, but it was a step towards freedom from Roman tyranny. But I had promised we'd see how this Jesus did when questioned. (*shaking his head*) He did not do well.

Spotlight off EHUD and spotlight on DEXIOS

DEXIOS: The Pharisees and Herodians who do not get along had decided to co-operate on this venture. They asked Jesus. If it was right to pay taxes to Caesar or not. He told them to show him a coin used for paying taxes. They brought him a denarius, and he asked them, "Whose portrait is this? And whose inscription?" Caesar's," they replied. (*Lights up on both*)

EHUD: (*upset*) Did you hear him!?

DEXIOS: Yes. He said, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's."

EHUD: (*incredulous*) He actually advocates paying taxes to the dirty Roman scum (*spits*)

DEXIOS: (*explaining*) But don't you see? As the coin is made in Caesar's image so we are made in God's image. He means for us to be God's, not the Romans.

EHUD: We don't have time to argue over this fellow. We have an opportunity to bring the kingdom one step closer. Tonight we take back part of what is ours from those greasy Romans. Dexios, you have been my right hand man these past few years. Are you with me or not?

DEXIOS: If we are caught... they cut the hands off thieves.

EHUD: If we're caught, we won't be that lucky. They'll crucify anyone who steals such important ROMAN things. But I freely give my life if it frees my nation, my brothers and sister, my children and their children. (*Grabbing his arms*) Now I ask you again. Are you with me?

DEXIOS: (*nodding*) Yes. I am with you. May we help restore the kingdom to Israel.

EHUD: Meet me by the governor's barracks at the third watch. (*clasping his hand, which DEXIOS then does with both hands*) The Lord watch between you and me...

DEXIOS: When we are absent one from another.

Lights off. After a few beats, spotlight on DEXIOS alone

DEXIOS: Our plans went awry and we were caught. It was a capital crime, stealing from the Roman government. Pilate handed us over for execution. (*DEXIOS drops to his knees, lights out on DEXIOS, spotlight on EHUD*)

EHUD: *(has removed his outer garments and his body is bruised and bloodied, as after a scourging. He is in pain, on knees, gasping out the words)* The Lord... watch between us *(Spotlight out)*

Very dim lights up. The outlines of three crosses upstage can be barely seen. DEXIOS has removed his outer garments and he has bruises and is bloodied as from a beating. He is on his knees. Spotlight on DEXIOS)

DEXIOS: *(gasping in pain)* When we are separated from each other. *(EHUD crawls to his cross).*

DEXIOS: *(to audience)* We had fought for our nation as brothers working side by side. We had toiled and lived together. *(a beat)* Now, we would die together. But another was sentenced to death with us. Jesus. *(Crawls to his cross. Silence for a few beats)*

EHUD: *(Spotlight on EHUD)* We were crucified with him, Dexios, my right hand man, on his right and me, Ehud the left handed, on his left. *(resentful)* He had come between us in life, and now he came between us in death *(Spotlight up on DEXIOS so that spots are on the thieves only, the middle cross is in darkness)*

DEXIOS: They nailed us to our crosses and placed him between us. Then it dawned on me, it was the Lord watching between the two of us ...

EHUD: *(angry)* Those who passed by hurled insults at Jesus, shaking their heads and saying, "You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!"

DEXIOS: *(With grief)* In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him. "He saved others," they said, "but he can't save himself!

EHUD: *(sarcastically)* He's the King of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, 'I am the Son of God.'

DEXIOS: *(With painful recall)* They said, "So! You, who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, come down from the cross and save yourself!"

EHUD: I also heaped insults upon him. "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!"

DEXIOS: (to *EHUD*) 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. (to *Jesus*) "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

VOICE OF JESUS: "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."

DEXIOS: And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. The earth shook and the rocks split. I was suffering, dying, my life being counted in a few more breaths. (With joy in his suffering) But I no longer struggled to hang on. He had said that I would be with him in paradise. That was all that mattered.

EHUD: "It is finished" he cried. (sorrowfully) And for me, for me, the hard hearted unbeliever, it was finished. (Lights out)