

WHY ISN'T JESUS HERE??

By
Jim Pappas
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This play was written in partial fulfillment of my M.A. requirements. Like several of my earlier plays, I have used this scores of times and it has given people some valuable insights into the amazing sacrifice of Jesus.

Jim Pappas

SCENE I

Several pilgrims are gathered in Jerusalem on the Sabbath just after the crucifixion. There is a strong difference of opinion.

Person 1: I tell you that Jesus was a man of God!

Person 2: Have any of the priests or rulers believed on Him?

Person 3: Go away! This Jesus was a fraud.

Person 4: Caiaphas and the chief priests have told us so.

Person 1: Caiaphas is an evil man.

Person 3: Hey! Take care how you speak of God's servant!

Person 4: Away with you!

Person 1: But I have proof from scriptures that Jesus...

Person 2: Nooo...!

Person 3: Away with you, if you want to stay in good health.

Person 4: And keep your blasphemous talk to yourself, if you know what's good for you.

(Exit person 1)

Person 3: Poor deluded fool.

Person 2: Don't worry, their leader is dead and in a few weeks they'll forget they ever heard of Him.

Eleazar: Good pilgrims.

Person 2: What?

Person 4: Who's that?

Person 3: Who are you?

Person 2: (Whispered) He dresses well.

Eleazar: My name is Eleazar. I am a man of Jerusalem.

Person 4: And a rich one, it seems.

Eleazar: God has been good to me.

Person 3: Well, what do you want with us?

Eleazar: Only to talk with you and learn what you know about the trial of a certain individual named...

Person 4: It was Jesus of Nazareth.

Person 3: The great Sanhedrin found Him guilty of sedition and blasphemy.

Eleazar: A very serious crime to be sure. And seriously has He paid for it.

Person 2: He deserved to die.

Person 3: Yeah. He was leading the whole nation astray.

Eleazar: But isn't this Jesus the one who healed the sick?

Person 4: All by the power of Beelzebub.

Eleazar: I have heard that He has also cast out demons. If He was a servant of the devil then He must have been confused.

Person 3: Oh, all the better to deceive the people.

Eleazar: Of course. That must be the answer. After all, it was Caiaphas who condemned Him.

Person 3: And Caiaphas is God's servant!

Eleazar: Yes, a man of God.

Person 4: Yes, a man of God!

Person 3: A good man.

Person 2: Very righteous.

Eleazar: Tell me, gentlemen. Have you heard the details about the trial?

Person 3: Only that He openly committed blasphemy.

Person 2: Before the full jury.

Person 4: And that Pilate gave his seal to their sentence.

Person 3: And had the deceiver executed as He deserved.

Eleazar: Do you want to hear more?

Person 4: Hmmm, yes. Tell us more.

Person 3: All you know of the matter.

Eleazar: I have been talking to several men who saw the whole affair. I can give you the facts.

Person 3: Yes, the facts. Give us all of the facts.

Eleazar: Everything?

Person 4: To the smallest detail.

Person 2: Leave nothing out.

Eleazar: All right. You are honest men. Therefore, all the facts it will be. On Thursday night Jesus kept the Passover with His disciples, as Moses commanded us. Odd that such a lawbreaker would bother to keep the Passover, isn't it.

Person 2: All the better to deceive the people!

Eleazar: Hmmm. No doubt true, for Caiaphas called Him a lawbreaker, and Caiaphas is a man of God.

Person 4: Yes! A good man!

Eleazar: After the Passover supper He went to the mountain to pray. It seems that a blasphemer should curse God rather than teach his disciples to pray. But Caiaphas called Him a blasphemer, and Caiaphas is a man of God.

Person 3: Most surely so. (Ad lib the others agreeing)

Eleazar: Later that night, the priests and soldiers of Caiaphas arrested the Man. It is against our laws to arrest a man by night, but, they came from Caiaphas, and Caiaphas is a man of God.

Person 2: This must have been some sort of a special case.

Person 3: Yes, a special case. For Caiaphas is God's servant.

Person 4: A man of God.

Eleazar: Indeed. From the mountain they led Him bound to Annas. It is not lawful for us to bind a man until he has been proven guilty. But, it was done by those sent by Caiaphas, and Caiaphas is a man of God.

All: (Puzzled - ad lib) Hmmm?

Eleazar: He was questioned by Annas before the trial. By our law all questioning must be public. But, surely, Annas must know what is best, for Annas too, is a man of God.

Person 2: Hmmm. That was not a good thing to do.

Person 3: He was a blasphemer!

Person 4: True. But even blasphemers deserve fair trials!

Person 3: Yes, that is true.

Eleazar: While it was yet dark, they held a preliminary trial before Caiaphas and some of the Sanhedrin. A trial by night is illegal by our law. But, Caiaphas is the servant of the Most High. A man of God.

Person 4: Caiaphas held a trial by night? I can't believe it.

Person 3: And with an incomplete jury? This is hard to believe of a man of God!

Person 2: Are you sure of your facts, Eleazar?

Eleazar: Quite sure. Shall I go on?

Person 2: Yes, tell us all the facts.

Person 3: The whole story.

Eleazar: Caiaphas put Jesus under oath saying, "I adjure you by the Living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God."

Person 3: Hmmm.

Eleazar: Jesus answered, "You have spoken correctly." Caiaphas tore His robe and pronounced Him a blasphemer!

Person 4: Tore his robe! The High Priest must never rip his robe. That is grounds for the death sentence!

Eleazar: Indeed. And I have been taught that our nation will not condemn a man on His own testimony. But that is what Caiaphas did. And Caiaphas is a man of God.

Person 3: These do not seem to be the actions of a "man of God".

Person 4: But the High Priest is God's servant. We have been taught that from our youth up.

Person 2: But it is illegal to condemn a man on his own testimony. I don't understand.

Eleazar: Hear me, faithful pilgrims. There is more.

Person 2: Shhhh. Hear him speak.

Person 3: Speak on.

Eleazar: After the court pronounced Him guilty, solely on His own testimony, He was given to the rabble of the street, bound and unprotected. They beat Him and spit upon Him. They cursed Him and mocked Him.

Person 4: What! Such a thing should not be done in Israel.

End of Sample for Scene I

SCENE II

Ben Ezra: Oh, of course He'll be there. They say He's been teaching and healing all week. Your troubles are almost over, my boy.

Reuban: I hope so. I don't think I can...

Person 1: Excuse me, but are you speaking of Jesus of Nazareth?

Ben Ezra: As a matter of fact we are. My friend here has heard of the Man's wonderful ability to heal and has come on a long and painful journey for just that purpose.

Person 1: I'm sorry to be the one to tell you, but you won't be healed today.

Ben Ezra: You mean He's very busy, no doubt. Well, if we must wait until tomorrow, what is one more day?

Person 1: No. Not today, or tomorrow, or ever. He will not be healed.

Reuban: Not healed?

Ben Ezra: Nonsense! Of course he will. The Man heals everyone who comes to Him. Why, there are entire villages where there is not one person ill because of Him.

Person 1: He can't heal you. He's not here.

Ben Ezra: Not here? Why, where could He have gone? He has been teaching and healing since the day He rode in as a King. Of course He's here.

Person 1: No He isn't. He's dead.

Reuban: No!

Ben Ezra: Dead! Ha ha...my dear young friend, that's impossible. He is still a young man, and very strong. He will be with us for some time to come.

Person 1: No He won't. At this very moment He lies dead.

Reuban: How did He die?

Person 1: He was crucified by...

Ben Ezra: Crucified! Now see here, young man, this joke is in very poor taste. I have a good mind to...

Person 1: Hey! Don't take my word for it. Ask anyone.

Ben Ezra: Come on, Reuban. Off to the temple with us. This man is a raving maniac. To think people like that are allowed to walk the streets.

Reuban: But suppose he is telling the truth? I shall not be healed. I have no strength to return home and I have no friends or work here. I shall starve.

Ben Ezra: Stop worrying. Look, you see? There are others coming for the same purpose. You there...You there on crutches...yes, you...where are you going?

Cripple: To the temple, to be healed by Jesus of Nazareth.

Ben Ezra: You see! Look up and down the street. There are hundreds of people just like yourself, perhaps thousands. Let us hurry or we'll have to wait for hours. ...Pardon me, sir....Oops, excuse me Ma'am...good sabbath...uh, pardon me, sir. Good sabbath.

Crier: I tell you all to go back! Jesus is not here! He is in Joseph's tomb, dead. Go back!

Reuban: Oh, no!

Ben Ezra: Don't listen to him, Reuban. On festival weeks the city crawls with maniacs and fools....Good sabbath, Rabbi.

Reuban: Good sabbath, Rabbi...why didn't he answer? He looked angry and worried.

Ben Ezra: Oh, I suppose a rabbi must have many things to think about on the sabbath day, my boy. Ah! Here is the court where Jesus usually teaches. Your years of suffering are almost over.

Reuban: Do you see him?

Ben Ezra: Hmmm, no, not yet. Strange.

Reuban: What is?

Ben Ezra: That I don't see Him. He usually sits right over there. I wonder where He could be. Excuse me, sir...

Person 2: Good Sabbath.

Ben Ezra: Good Sabbath. Sir, have you seen Jesus yet today?

Person 2: Jesus who?

Ben Ezra: Why, Jesus of Nazareth, of course. My friend here has come to be healed.

Person 2: Hmmp. Tell your friend to go home. Jesus is dead.

Ben Ezra: No...you don't understand. We want Jesus of Nazareth, the healer.

Person 2: Jesus of Nazareth, the healer, is dead.

Ben Ezra: But He was still a young man, and very...

Person 2: That doesn't matter. He is dead.

Ben Ezra: But how?

Person 2: He was crucified by Pontius Pilate.

Reuban: No! Not Him!

Ben Ezra: Crucified! No! That is only for the worst of criminals. He was a good man. I don't believe you.

Person 2: Ask anyone.

Ben Ezra: I certainly shall. Excuse me, sir. We are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, the healer. Have you seen Him yet?

Man: I've only just arrived myself, but I've heard rumors that the priests and rulers have had Him put to death.

Ben Ezra: Now I know it's a lie. The priests and rulers are men of God-good men. They would never allow anything like that to happen.

Person 2: It's true, old man. He died on a cross yesterday, at three o'clock.

End of Sample for Scene II

SCENE III

Rabbi: It was the worst I've ever seen it, Holiness. The court was packed with sick people, all of them crying out for Jesus.

Caiaphas: I thought the fools would forget Him.

Rabbi: But it's only gotten worse. What shall we do?

Caiaphas: I don't know! Anything. Try to divert their attention.

Rabbi: But how?

Caiaphas: I don't know how...

Rabbi 2: Holiness, there is a group of men outside, asking to see you.

Caiaphas: What do they want?

Rabbi 2: I'm not sure, Holiness, but they have Scriptures with them.

Caiaphas: Tell them I'm too busy for a Bible study right now.

Rabbi 2: They are educated and wealthy men, Holiness. It would be unwise to offend them.

Caiaphas: Pah! First beggars and now rich men! Will I never have any peace?...Tell them I'll be right out...

All: Good Sabbath, Holiness.

Caiaphas: Good Sabbath, gentlemen. May I be of service to you in any way?

Eleazar: Yes, Holiness. We have been studying the Scriptures very deeply during the last few hours.

Caiaphas: Oh? Very commendable. Be sure that God will bless your diligence.

Eleazar: Yes, Holiness. Uh, while we were studying, we found several texts which have caused us some concern.

Caiaphas: Of course. There are several passages of Scripture which are almost impossible to understand alone. For these you will need the help of God's priests.

Eleazar: Yes, Holiness. Which is why we have come to you.

Caiaphas: Very wise of you.

Eleazar: Our questions concern the mission of the Messiah.

Caiaphas: Oh, yes...well, as you all know, the Messiah will soon appear at the head of the armies of Israel. He will overthrow Rome, and set Israel up as queen of the earth. We will have wealth, wisdom and all the other choice blessings of God. To quote Isaiah, "The

Lord of Hosts shall reign in Mt. Zion, and in Jerusalem.' And to quote from King David, 'He shall have dominion also from sea to sea...and His enemies shall lick the dust...yea...all nations shall serve Him.' This day, gentlemen, is very soon to come.

Eleazar: Yes, Holiness. But in the book of Zechariah (ch. 9) we read that the Messiah will ride into Jerusalem on a colt, the foal of an ass. This seems to have been fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth.

Caiaphas: Oh, come now. A very easy trick for a false Messiah to play.

Jacob: True, Holiness. But in Micah (ch5), we read that He would be born in Bethlehem. That would be somewhat more difficult for Jesus to arrange, don't you think?

Caiaphas: Mere co-incidence. Lots of babies have been born in Bethlehem.

End of Sample for Scene III
