

COMPELLED

by Teryl S. Cartwright



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Compelled

A dramatization for Holy Week

by Teryl S. Cartwright

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Six speakers, may be male or female

Narrator

First Bystander

An optimist who grows pessimistic

Second Bystander

A cynic who becomes optimistic

Simon

Someone filled with regret and remorse

Weeping Woman

Someone filled with fear and confusion

Judge

Someone filled with guilt and anger

*You may also need a soloist and pianist for the suggested musical interludes.

PRODUCTION NOTES

This spare and thoughtful drama includes the seven last words of Christ coupled with fascinating parallels from Psalm 23. Though the Lord is our Shepherd, he first became the lamb through his crucifixion. Even those who wanted to be bystanders at that time, like Simon of Cyrene, were compelled to take part in his story — as are we. Nobody is a bystander! Moments of silence, haunting music, shadowy darkness, and the holy solemnity of a pounding gavel pronouncing irreversible judgment will challenge your congregation at any Holy Week service. It is very easy to stage, with a short length and small cast with gender flexibility.

Costumes

While the Narrator may wear regular dress clothes, the actors should be dressed alike in robes or biblical costumes.

Set Design

At far Stage Right, place a large wooden cross with a sign on the front saying, “Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.” Place a desk or small table and chair at Stage Left.

Props

You will need a Bible or scroll and a gavel or wooden mallet.

Music

If you are using a soloist for the beginning optional song, you will need music. Additionally, the congregation will need projected lyrics, hymnals, or printed music (perhaps in the bulletin) for the other two songs.

1 **NARRATOR:** (*Enters and recites.*) **You cannot be a bystander,**
2 **For you are compelled to carry the cross.**
3 **Weep for your children**
4 **And judge who Jesus is.**

5
6 **For you are compelled to carry the cross**
7 **When watching him go by,**
8 **And judge who Jesus is**
9 **As he stands before you.**

10
11 **When watching him go by,**
12 **Weep for your children.**
13 **As he stands before you,**
14 **You cannot be a bystander.**

15
16 **On Good Friday we often journey from the courtroom**
17 **to the cross. But what would happen if we retraced**
18 **Jesus' route backwards, from the cross to the**
19 **courtroom, instead? Someday we will make a similar**
20 **journey when we travel from the cross to the heavenly**
21 **court above.**

22 **As we seek to follow the Shepherd, let us see how he**
23 **became the lamb. Let us learn how those who wanted to**
24 **be bystanders were compelled to take part in his story.**
25 **After all, you cannot be a bystander of this day either.**
26 **No one can.**

27 *Optional: If you have music that uses Psalm 23 for its lyrics, the*
28 *soloist may sing this while the ACTORS take their places as*
29 *listed below. (Four ACTORS enter and cross to far Stage Right*
30 *to face a large wooden cross. SECOND BYSTANDER holds a*
31 *Bible. They freeze as JUDGE comes out holding a gavel to*
32 *hammer the cross. The JUDGE hammers gavel three times*
33 *slowly, as if nailing someone to the cross on one side.)*

34 **FIRST BYSTANDER:** (*Pointing to cross*) **Who is he?**

35 **SECOND BYSTANDER:** (*Reading the sign*) **Jesus of Nazareth,**
36 **King of the Jews.** (*The JUDGE moves to other side of cross to*
37 *hammer the gavel again three times slowly.*)

38 **FIRST BYSTANDER:** **What did he do?**

1 **WOMAN: He's innocent.** *(She moves away to stand on far side of*
 2 *the room near the desk. The JUDGE raps the gavel again three*
 3 *times in bottom center of cross.)*

4 **SECOND BYSTANDER: Then why him?**

5 **SIMON: He took the place of someone else.** *(He moves to center*
 6 *of room.)*

7 **SONG: Verse 3 of "Ah, Holy Jesus" is sung by the audience.**

8 **Lo, the Good Shepherd for the sheep is offered;**

9 **The slave hath sinned, and the Son hath suffered.**

10 **For our atonement, while we nothing heeded,**

11 **God interceded.**

12 *(As the music plays, the JUDGE crosses to sit at his desk and*
 13 *leaves the BYSTANDERS to stand beside the cross. After the*
 14 *music ends the SECOND BYSTANDER opens a Bible before*
 15 *speaking.)*

16 **SECOND BYSTANDER: (Holding open Bible at Psalm 23,**
 17 *reading the King James Version)* **Maybe reading will**
 18 **help — I feel weird just waiting for someone to die.**
 19 **Here's a good one: "The Lord is my shepherd that I shall**
 20 **not want."**

21 **FIRST BYSTANDER: You read that wrong.**

22 **SECOND BYSTANDER: I did? Sorry. But I thought I heard**
 23 **someone here call *Jesus* a shepherd, and look what**
 24 **happened to him.**

25 **FIRST BYSTANDER: Just say it right.**

26 **SECOND BYSTANDER: "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall**
 27 **not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures,**
 28 **he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my**
 29 **soul ... "** *(Pauses, as if listening)* **Did you say something?**

30 **FIRST BYSTANDER: It wasn't me. He said it. He said, "I**
 31 **thirst."**

32 **SECOND BYSTANDER: "He leadeth me in paths of**
 33 **righteousness for his name's sake. Yea though I walk**
 34 **through the valley of the shadow of death,** *(Pause,*
 35 *quieter)* **Yea, though I walk through the valley of the**
 36 **shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for *thou art with me.***

37 **FIRST BYSTANDER: Did you hear that? He said, "My God,**
 38 **my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"**

1 SECOND BYSTANDER: I heard.

2 FIRST BYSTANDER: It's as if we're mocking him. Are we?

3 SECOND BYSTANDER: I don't know. But why don't you
4 finish? *(Hands Bible off.)*

5 FIRST BYSTANDER: "Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort
6 me ... " Funny, two pieces of wood, just like the cross.
7 But comforting? Not for him.

8 SECOND BYSTANDER: Listen to that. He said, "Father,
9 forgive them, for they know not what they do."

10 FIRST BYSTANDER: "Thou preparest a table for me in the
11 presence of mine enemies. *(Pause)* Thou anointest my
12 head with oil, my cup overfloweth ... "

13 SECOND BYSTANDER: Look — someone gave him a drink,
14 but he didn't drink it.

15 FIRST BYSTANDER: *(Rushed)* "Surely goodness and mercy
16 shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell
17 in the house of the Lord forever."

18 SECOND BYSTANDER: He said — he said, "It is finished."
19 *(Lights are quickly turned out and then turned back on after a
20 moment.)*

21 FIRST BYSTANDER: *(Hushed)* It is finished.

22 SECOND BYSTANDER: I guess so. Now let's head back the
23 way we came. *(Pause)* Excuse us, let us pass. *(Both have
24 crossed to SIMON, one on each side, though he's ignoring them
25 by his pacing and blocks their way when they try to brush by
26 him.)*

27 SIMON: Don't touch me! Don't. *(Pause, then continues talking as
28 if to self, pointing downward)* I was standing right here.
29 *(Points a short distance away)* Or was it here? I have to
30 remember. I have to think. It wasn't so long ago, but it
31 feels like it. Yet it was only a few hours earlier when
32 they brought him this way.

33 SECOND BYSTANDER: Oh, you mean before the Crucifixion,
34 when they paraded him through the streets?

35 SIMON: I didn't want to do it. They pulled me out of the
36 crowd, and I was compelled to take his cross. Compelled!
37 I didn't want to be part of it; you have to believe me. I had
38 just stopped to watch. I didn't want to carry it.

- 1 FIRST BYSTANDER: It was nice of you, though, to carry his
2 cross when he couldn't.
- 3 SIMON: Nice? To help a man to his death? I wonder ... would
4 he have died in the street if I hadn't carried the cross?
5 What if there had been a last-minute reprieve? What if I
6 had refused? Maybe then I would've been allowed to
7 melt back into the crowd, nameless and unknown. Now
8 everyone knows my name and even where I'm from.
9 *And worst of all, what I did.*
- 10 SECOND BYSTANDER: Don't feel guilty. You can't change
11 what happened. Look, the crowds were here. They
12 outnumbered the soldiers! Why didn't *they* do anything?
13 Why couldn't someone at least help *you*? You didn't help
14 him die. If anything, everyone did.
- 15 FIRST BYSTANDER: Besides, if he was the son of God, then
16 maybe he didn't feel as much pain. Maybe it wasn't as
17 bad as it looked.
- 18 SIMON: *How dare you!* I was there! You were there! He
19 couldn't go any farther. He couldn't. He absolutely
20 couldn't carry on. I took his cross. How could you
21 suggest he wasn't suffering? That it wasn't as bad as it
22 looked? How could you even suggest that he wasn't fully
23 human?
- 24 SECOND BYSTANDER: And yet ... and yet the sky went dark
25 when he died. We saw that too. You did too. How could
26 anyone suggest he wasn't fully God?
- 27 FIRST BYSTANDER: I don't understand. I can't. *(Pause)* Look
28 — I just want to move on.
- 29 SIMON: I can't. I can't just go home. Not now. Not yet. Though
30 I can't remember it all, I have to try. Though I don't want
31 to remember, I must. For when I go home tonight I have
32 to pass through the doorway marked with the lamb's
33 blood, and yet ... and yet I still see — and feel — the wood
34 soaked with his blood instead. *(Both BYSTANDERS leave*
35 *SIMON and cross to the WEeping WOMAN.)*
- 36 SECOND BYSTANDER: Why are you still crying? It's over.
- 37 FIRST BYSTANDER: Let her be. Can't you see she wants to
38 be left alone?

- 1 WOMAN: No, please. Please don't leave me! I'm so afraid.
- 2 SECOND BYSTANDER: You have nothing to fear. The
3 soldiers are gone.
- 4 WOMAN: I'm not afraid of the soldiers. You don't
5 understand. No one understands. I was right here, and
6 he spoke to me. (*Gestures toward cross.*) I wept for him,
7 and he spoke. That is why I am afraid.
- 8 FIRST BYSTANDER: Don't be afraid. You couldn't save the
9 man going to the cross. But at least you had compassion
10 for him.
- 11 WOMAN: I keep hearing his words, over and over. He said,
12 "Weep not for me, *but for yourself and your children.*"
13 Why, oh why, did he say that?
- 14 SECOND BYSTANDER: I'm sure that he didn't want you to
15 cry for him. He didn't want you to cry for something
16 that couldn't be changed or for something that had to
17 happen. That's all. There's nothing to be afraid of.
- 18 WOMAN: Oh, yes there is. You were here. You saw it all. The
19 crowds — pushing, shoving, cheering, jeering.
20 Laughing as a man crawled with his cross. Talking
21 about their kids and the weather and what they were
22 going to eat for dinner as he was sliced with whips. A
23 week ago, only a week ago they bowed before him and
24 today they spat and shook their fists at him. And I keep
25 remembering *their* words to Pilate saying, "Let his
26 blood be on our hands *and that of our children.*" Our
27 children. Is this why I am to weep for myself and my
28 children? Is that what Jesus meant?
- 29 FIRST BYSTANDER: He was going to his death. You
30 couldn't expect him to offer *you* words of comfort or
31 hope in the midst of such pain and despair.
- 32 WOMAN: He usually did, though — but not this time. Not as
33 he went to his death. He looked up at us, fierce and
34 anguished, his voice a command and a rebuke. "Weep
35 not for me." Angry as any crowd; more fearful than any
36 mob in his loneliness. Why, oh why aren't you afraid
37 too?
- 38 SECOND BYSTANDER: What should I fear? The crazed

1 crowds or the dead man? There's nothing I can do about
2 either.

3 WOMAN: We watched and did nothing, expecting to go back
4 to our normal, ordinary lives as if nothing happened.
5 God left us alone with all that we did or didn't do, and
6 now we are all alone. Like we left him.

7 FIRST BYSTANDER: You can come with us if you want. You
8 don't have to stay here all alone.

9 WOMAN: No, I can't go back with you. Not now. Not yet. I
10 cannot go back home as if nothing has happened.
11 Though I've no tears left, I still want to cry. Though I
12 am afraid, I still have to cry. *(The two BYSTANDERS*
13 *continue walking on and cross to the JUDGE seated at the*
14 *desk.)*

15 JUDGE: *(Stands quickly and puts hand out.)* Stand back! You've
16 come to blame me, and I won't let you.

17 FIRST BYSTANDER: You are the one who condemned Jesus
18 to die.

19 JUDGE: No, no, the crowd did that. *They* called for
20 crucifixion. They wanted Barabbas released, not Jesus.
21 Think of that! Did you know Barabbas means "son of
22 Abba"? So they, the crowd, they were the ones who
23 exchanged the "son of the Father" for the "son of the
24 father." Jesus took someone else's place, so really, it's
25 not my fault. Not my fault at all.

26 SECOND BYSTANDER: You are the one who sent him to
27 Pilate. You gave him to the Romans so that he would be
28 put to death. It wasn't enough to arrest him. It wasn't
29 enough to beat him. You are the one who sent him to his
30 death.

31 JUDGE: No, no. Pilate was the one who said Jesus was
32 innocent, and yet he was the one that let him be killed.
33 We only gave him to the Romans so that we could
34 celebrate Passover as God commanded us to do.

35 FIRST BYSTANDER: But the very law you speak of states
36 that anyone who touches a dead body is unclean and
37 unable to celebrate Passover. How then can anyone
38 who *causes* that death still celebrate and be clean?



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