

SOUNDS OF GUILT AND GLORY

by Calvin R. Layles



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SOUNDS OF GUILT AND GLORY

A Holy Week monologue program

by Calvin R. Sayles

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(Pairs denote biblical character first,
followed by contemporary counterpart.)

Seeker — Male who represents all who wonder about spiritual matters.

Pilate — Roman ruler.

Skeptic — Male with a jaded outlook.

Centurion — Male Roman military official.

Businessman — Finds identity in his work.

Thomas — The doubting disciple.

Scientist — Woman whose career demands logic.

Mary Magdalene — Female follower of Jesus.

Mariah — Woman struggling with wrongdoing.

Peter — The disciple who denied.

Pete — College-aged guy.

Thief — Crucified with Jesus.

Everyhuman — Male; representative of all people.

Choir

PRODUCTION NOTES

The hope of this event is to bring people to a personal encounter with the cross. In both the first century and the twenty-first century, the potential responses are much the same. Some evade and some affirm. Some offer their doubts while others offer adoration. Some deny the cross and Christ while others make profound statements of faith. All of these sounds were made and are made around the cross.

The barriers of time are removed in this presentation as six monologues are presented. Each monologue begins with a well-known biblical character, but then halfway through, transitions into a twenty-first century character who finishes the monologue with the same theme. The intention is to make the Bible come alive, help the hearer realize that humanity does not change and still has a great need for a Savior, and most importantly, make a powerful decision for Christ as they see the cross in a new way. Choral or contemporary songs that complement the theme may be included between each monologue pairing.

May your performance help unlock hearts to the truth of the Gospel.

Costumes: All the characters may also be in the choir and simply step out when it is time for their part. The entire choir wears biblical robes. The contemporary characters may wear a biblical robe over their character's clothing. A nice touch is if the clothing of the contemporary character matches the biblical character's in some way, such as the color.

- Everyhuman wears blue jeans and an untucked white shirt.
- Seeker and Skeptic both wear casual modern clothing, i.e., a shirt with an open collar.
- The Businessman wears a professional-looking suit and tie.
- The Scientist also dresses professionally, perhaps with a white lab coat over her clothing.
- Mariah dresses simply in a nice blouse paired with jeans.
- Pete wears very casual clothing — whatever college students currently wear.
- Pilate is dressed in royal robes.
- The Centurion is dressed in Roman soldier attire (helmet, tunic, strips of cardboard affixed to a belt all around), but without his breastplate.

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- The thief wears tattered, dirty clothing — not as nice as the others.
- All the other biblical characters wear the standard robe, sandals, and headpieces.

Music: Only broad types of songs are suggested so that you may fill in the blanks with your own church's preferences and available music. Include or leave out music as needed.

Set and Props: The stage is set simply with two large crosses. There is space left for a third cross the same size in between. The crosses, slightly elevated at the back of the sanctuary, are dimly lit from underneath. Six tables (white pillars were used in the original production) are distributed evenly across the front of the stage area.

The six tables contain:

1. A glass bowl of water with a towel beside it and red food coloring behind it
2. A Roman breastplate
3. Large nails
4. Rags
5. A fake fire in a pot (such as those used at Halloween — a safe electrical device)
6. A small (nine to twelve inches high) cross. Use clay to make a base for it so it will stand upright and be visible to the congregation. Additional props needed are a hammer and nine nails, and palm branches for some choir members.

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Sounds of Guilt

OPTIONAL CHOIR SONG: *Overture* (A song about the cross)

(EVERYHUMAN enters Stage Right carrying a hammer and nails. He goes to the cross which is on the floor at Center Stage, then kneels and pounds the nails in slowly, three at each hand position and three at the feet, for nine total strikes — the sound of guilt. As he is pounding in the nails, two men in biblical robes move from the stage and kneel behind him. When EVERYHUMAN finishes the nine strikes, he stands and exits Stage Right, head hanging. Off-Stage, he puts a biblical robe on over his white shirt and joins the choir. The two remaining men then take the cross and position it heavily — the sound of guilt — between the two crosses. The center cross is then illuminated from below in a golden light.

Immediately, as the cross is positioned, CHOIR MEMBERS' voices call out a strange mixture of "Hosanna!" and "Crucify him!" The voices alternate and disagree between sounds of joy and sounds of anger. The choir stands at the flanks of the three crosses; some are praising, still with palm branches; others are condemning — some members argue with each other. "Don't you see he is the Messiah?" "Glory!" "Don't be stupid ... he is just a man from Nazareth ... even his brothers say so!" "Hosanna!" "Guilty!" "Crucify him!")

OPTIONAL CHOIR SONG: Another number about the cross by the CHOIR. (As the music starts, the arguing ceases immediately, and they begin to sing.)

SEEKER: (Enters and stands at Center Stage.) The cross. It's everywhere. Men wear it around their neck or have it tattooed on their arms ... and yet it doesn't seem to make much of a difference in their lives. What am I missing? Women wear them too as jewelry, as earrings, as ornaments pierced through their noses, or even their navels, for goodness' sakes. What does it mean to them? Anything? Everything? I don't see it — what am I missing?

10 But not *that* cross. (*Gesturing to the center cross*) What
11 could possibly be beautiful about *that* cross? *That* cross
12 was a tool of torture. That cross was a sign of earthly
13 power that said, “Don’t mess with us, or *you* could have
14 one just like it!” That cross tore flesh. That cross
15 humiliated and instilled terror. On that cross he died,
16 alone and forsaken, as almost all who knew him ran
17 away in fear. The sound of the nails proclaim it! Like a
18 gavel echoing through a courtroom — guilty! (*Quickly*)
19 That cross is a sign of failure, isn’t it?

25
26

28

34 And I can't win here. If I squash this rabble as they
35 deserve, then taxes are interrupted, and Caesar will not
36 tolerate that. If I am too lenient, they will surely
37 interpret it as weakness and rise against me. And if
38 there is another uprising, Caesar will surely remove

me. *(Smiling and dripping with sarcasm)* And so I dance with the Jews. I postpone, I defer, I avoid ... my voice is the very sound of evasion.

It was in the spring, the only tolerable time of the year, that they brought him to me. He didn't look like much. He didn't say anything. They had beaten him a bit, but nothing remarkable — except their hatred. That was clear. Trumped-up charges — clearly he was guilty of nothing, and yet they were so persistent. So the dance begins. *(Hatefully)*

"You judge him — clearly this is an internal matter." But they would not accept that evasion. Who is this man that he would inspire such ... anger? The dance continues. "Send him to Herod — he is a Jew. Let Herod judge him." A clever dodge, but Herod was cleverer than I thought and sent him back with only a good beating. Skirt the responsibility, I thought. "You decide — should I release Barabbas, a thief and a murderer, or this Jesus?" *(At this point SKEPTIC may quietly enter and stand on the other side of the table or pillar with the bowl of water. He slips out of his biblical robe. He is dressed casually underneath.)*

"Barabbas!" they chanted. "Put Jesus to death!" *(Shaking head in disbelief)* I did everything I could to release him — to make no decision. Avoidance, skirting, hedging, postponing ... always evading. But finally they screamed at me, "If you release this Man, you are no friend of Caesar; everyone who makes himself out to be a king opposes Caesar" *(John 19:12)*. Ahhhh, you clever, snarling dogs. All right, then. Take him. Crucify him! What does it matter to me anyway? I wash my hands of the entire thing — one last evasion. *(Dipping hands in the water, with the food coloring concealed. He squirts in a few drops and the water turns red. Dries hands.)* Still, sometimes at night when I am alone, I remember his face and wonder ...

PILATE and SKEPTIC: *(Together, with spotlights on both of them)* Who is this man that made people so angry? *(Spot*

1 *fades on PILATE and he exits as SKEPTIC begins. He is*
 2 *friendly, as if talking to a casual acquaintance.)*

3 **SKEPTIC:** Who is this man that people get so emotional
 4 about? (*Shrugging*) I mean, what's the point? People get
 5 so upset when you talk about religion. We have a
 6 standing rule in my house: no talk of politics or
 7 religion! Don't offend anybody. Keep the peace!
 8 Everyone has a right to believe whatever they want!

9 **Right?**

10 **What do I believe?** (*Pausing thoughtfully*) The truth is, I
 11 really don't know what I believe. "Live and let live," I
 12 guess. I don't like to think about it. (*Lighter*) So, I avoid!
 13 **Compromise!** (*Bows gracefully or executes a simple dance*
 14 *step.*) Skirt and dodge — that's my dance.

15 **It's hard sometimes, though. My wife believes. She**
 16 **takes the kids to church two or three times a week.**
 17 **What's the harm, right? A little school, a little soccer ...**
 18 **a little God. But when she leaves to go to church, she**
 19 **looks at me with this strange look in her eyes. She**
 20 **doesn't say anything, but I know she's ...** (*Struggling to*
 21 *describe it*) **worried? Afraid? Sad. It almost makes me**
 22 **want to believe. I wish I had what she has. I wish I had**
 23 **that peace. But it's hard.**

24 **A few Sundays ago, my little girl grabbed my leg,**
 25 **looked up into my eyes, and asked, "Daddy, why don't**
 26 **you go to church with us?"** (*Pausing ... patting her*
 27 *imaginary head.*) **Maybe someday I will, baby. (Now to**
 28 **audience) When I've had my fun — when I'm finished**
 29 **dancing ... maybe there will be time to think about it.**
 30 **Until then, dance ... dodge ... defer. Mine is the voice of**
 31 **evasion. (One finger swirling water in the bowl) There's**
 32 **always time, right?** (*Spotlight fades and SKEPTIC exits.*)

33

34 **OPTIONAL CHOIR SONG:** Any number about wondering,
 35 questions, or doubting.

36

37

38

Sounds of Affirmation

CENTURION: (*Enters and stands by table with breastplate. A spotlight shines on him.*) It was always quite a show, any time there was a crucifixion. I always had mixed feelings every time it was my turn to guard those sentenced to death. I have to admit part of me enjoyed the scene. There were the mourners that cried and wailed, and these Jews were especially good at that. Then there were the mockers and those that ridiculed. There were plenty of them that day, especially toward the one in the middle. "If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross!" (*Matthew 27:40*). That was new. Even the robbers on each side who would die right along with him insulted this Jesus of Nazareth as well. Can you imagine? Quite a show. And of course there are those being crucified. You can tell a lot about a man by the way he dies.

Anyway, it was my turn to accompany the condemned. Part of me enjoyed it, but part of me was sickened by it. It was the bloodiest form of execution ever invented. But there was no time for much thought about that. And so I put on my breastplate and fastened my chin strap and (*Slapping his chest hard, in a kind of salute*) became a Roman soldier! That's who I am. That's what gives life meaning. My profession, my comrades, the power and fear that this uniform instills.

It was quite the show. A few less mourners than usual. A few more taunters. And so my comrades and I sat down to watch ... and to wait. That's when I noticed the differences. The sky became heavy and dark, like nothing I had ever seen before. Jesus was already beaten worse than any man I had ever seen. Even so, he didn't cry out in anger or hate. He barely spoke, and when he did, they weren't words of anger. They were prayers asking for forgiveness of others. They were words of encouragement to His mother and even to the thief on the cross beside Him. He prayed to his God like

no prayer I had ever heard, and finally he said, “It is finished!” (*John 19:30*). (*At this point BUSINESSMAN may quietly enter and stand on the other side of the table with the breastplate. He slips out of his biblical robe, revealing a suit and tie underneath.*)

I didn’t see everything that happened, but I felt the earth shake as I looked up into his face. I was told later that their temple was damaged, and tombs were opened and people were even raised from the dead! I don’t know about that, but I heard his words and I saw his face! And I felt as empty as that breastplate. And I knew ... I *knew* and I affirm to this day!

CENTURION and BUSINESSMAN: (*Together, with spotlights on both of them*) Truly this was the Son of God! (*Matthew 27:54*). (*Spot fades on CENTURION and he exits as BUSINESSMAN begins.*)

BUSINESSMAN: You see, at the low point of my life, nothing was working. My relationships were cheap and hollow. I was failing at my job, and my job defined who I was! (*Gesturing to his coat and tie*) Everyone has a uniform, and this is mine! And without this uniform, I was nothing.

And so I drank and partied and chased women. Yet everything I tried only seemed to tear at the hole in my heart — until I came to the point where I didn’t care if I lived or I died.

That’s when these ... Christians came into my life. People who didn’t know each other but “coincidentally” came into my life, all at the same time! (*Amazed*) Men and women sharing their lives with me, offering words of concern and encouragement. And telling me about Jesus.

The words of Jesus made an incredible impression on my aching heart. But so did the “coincidence” of so many different people speaking truth into my life at the same time. It was as if there was a grand organizer behind them. A grand and loving orchestrator who cared about me. It was a sign — just for me.

Not long after, I trusted Jesus with my life. He filled

my life unlike a job, or an earthly relationship or alcohol or drugs or anything. He changed my life and my eternity. And I affirm that truly he is my Savior. Truly he is the Son of God!

OPTIONAL CHOIR SONG: "Amazing Love"

Sounds of Doubt

THOMAS: (*Enters and stands by table with large nails. A spotlight shines on him.*) It was just four days ago that they seized him and our world began to crumble. It was just three days ago that they pierced his hands and feet and thrust a spear into his side. And when they took his broken body down off of the cross, the world no longer crumbled ... it was just over. No more dreams. No more miracles. And no more hope.

He told us he was leaving. I didn't understand then, and I don't understand now. I cried out in panic, Lord, we do not know where you are going, how do we know the way? (*John 14:5*). More cryptic answers, and now we are alone.

And tonight the others come running to me in excitement, saying, "We have seen the Lord! We have seen the Lord!" (*John 20:25*). And I told them, no! No! (*Almost screaming the second time.*) I will not believe! I will not risk again! How can I open my heart ... again? And I said to them, (*Picking up the nail and pressing it hard against his palm.*) "Unless I see in his hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe" (*John 20:25*). (*At this point SCIENTIST may quietly enter and stand on the other side of the table or pillar with the bowl of water. She slips out of her biblical robe, with professional clothing and a lab coat on underneath. Pausing*) And with those words, I found myself on the same side of the cross as all of those who doubted and denied him. Of those who

1 rejected and despised and doubted him. On the same
 2 side of the cross as all those who marked and pierced
 3 him with terrible, bitter nails. And now I am asking to
 4 see those marks.

5 It's not that I'm a coward — I would have died for
 6 him. *(Desperately defending himself)* I told him that, and I
 7 would have! Maybe believing is harder. But I have to
 8 touch to know. I have to see to believe. To risk again.
 9 *(Pause, as if thinking it over)* Enough! I told them no.

10 THOMAS and SCIENTIST: *(Together, with spotlights on both of*
 11 *them)* You have to show me if I am to believe. *(Spot fades*
 12 *on THOMAS and he exits as SCIENTIST begins.)*

13 SCIENTIST: I'm a scientist! I have to see it with my own
 14 eyes. It's like ... *(Pausing)* this year we lost Grandma. I
 15 think I was her favorite, and I know she was mine. She
 16 knew I struggled with seeing and believing. And so
 17 every time we said good-bye, she would touch my face
 18 with a hand as light and soft as a feather and say, "I'm
 19 praying for you, baby." *(Smiling, louder a second time)* "I'm
 20 praying for you, baby."

21 *(Softly, desperately)* Praying for what? To see what only
 22 she could see? Grandma used to say, "You have to leap
 23 before you can see." But I just can't. I doubt everything!
 24 I have to see before I leap. You have to show me! I need
 25 the proof. Show me the science. I need to hold the
 26 fossils in my hands, and then I will know. *(Picking up the*
 27 *nail and pressing it hard to palm)* Show me the archeology,
 28 and let me read the carbon dating myself. I've got to see
 29 it, feel it, touch it, and then maybe I could believe.

30 But not Grandma. The night she passed we stood by
 31 her bed, hoping to hear her voice one last time. We
 32 never did. But once she opened her eyes, and her face
 33 came alive with a smile sooooo very big. And it was as if
 34 she could actually see what she had hoped for and
 35 believed in all of her life. Whatever she saw must have
 36 been beautiful, because her face almost glowed. But I
 37 couldn't see it. *(Pause)*

38 Albert Einstein once said, "The more I study science,

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the more I believe in God.” *(Smiling)* He was a scientist too, and he did some pretty good work. What could he see that I can’t? I don’t know the way. *(Panicking)* Maybe I’m just afraid to risk. *(Honestly)* Maybe I’m afraid it will just change too much. Change me. Like it changed Grandma? I guess that wouldn’t be so bad. I wish she were here.

(Touching her own face) “I’m praying for you, baby.” *(Pausing to think)* No, just not the way I’m built. You have to show me.

OPTIONAL CHOIR SONG: A number about falling short.

Sounds of Adoration

MARY MAGDALENE: *(Enters and stands by table with rags. A spotlight shines on her.)* You can’t imagine what it was like. It wasn’t just that I was empty and alone. It was as if I was being ... torn apart. I was torn away from my family, who were tired and embarrassed by all my mistakes. I knew they loved me, but for some reason that wasn’t enough for me. I was an outcast from my own family, and I can’t even blame them.

And as terrible as that is, I was torn on the inside as well. I knew what was right and what was wrong, and I always moved to what was wrong. And the insane thing was that nothing brought me joy. It just ripped me further away from those who loved me and tore at my heart until I wasn’t sure if life was worth living. Part of me just wanted to scream at them, “Just throw the rocks! Get it over with!” *(Softer)* My life was in shambles and worth nothing more than tattered, filthy rags. *(Touching the rags on the table)*

But then there was Jesus, and the way he looked at me was completely different than the way anyone ever looked at me before. He looked at me, and I could tell he really saw me. Saw all my mistakes, all my sin, all the

1 terrible things that people already knew and worse
 2 things that they didn't. He saw me ... and even so, Jesus
 3 loved me. No shame and no guilt. He saw me and he
 4 loved me too much to leave me that way. *(At this point*
 5 *MARIAH may quietly enter and stand on the other side of the*
 6 *table or pillar with the rags. She slips out of her biblical robe.*
 7 *She is dressed casually underneath.)*

8 And so he touched me and cast out seven demons that
 9 had torn at my soul. He healed me, and for the first time
 10 in my life, I was whole. And not just me but so many! He
 11 gave sight to the blind. The lame walked because of his
 12 touch. The dead were raised from the grave! *(Stretching*
 13 *arms out wide making a cross)* And the sins of the world
 14 were forgiven. My sins — your sins.

15 And what else could I do but love him for it? Adore
 16 him! Worship him! Honor and respect him. He deserves
 17 our devotion! He touched me and healed me!

18 MARY MAGDALENE and MARIAH: *(Together, with spotlights*
 19 *on both of them)* And nothing has been the same since
 20 that day. *(Spot fades on MARY MAGDALENE and she exits*
 21 *as MARIAH begins.)*

22 MARIAH: And nothing has been the same since that day. For
 23 me, no one knew. My co-workers, my family, and
 24 certainly those that sat around me at church. The same
 25 church my parents had attended all their lives, and now
 26 I was too. The church where I went to vacation Bible
 27 school and camp when I was a teen — the same camp I
 28 now sent my kids to. And no one knew. The church I
 29 was baptized in ... They smiled, I smiled, and yet I was
 30 torn up inside. It was my secret, and mine alone. Mine
 31 to carry and hide in shame.

32 I knew the things I was involved with were wrong,
 33 and yet week after week, I failed. And so there I was,
 34 Sunday after Sunday, asking for forgiveness and hating
 35 myself for failing. It was like something had a hold of
 36 me. Something I didn't understand. I knew what was
 37 right, and yet I ran toward what was wrong. On the
 38 outside, no one knew. I smiled, they smiled, my clothes

were neat and tidy ... but on the inside, my life felt like tattered rags. And I hated it!

Until the day I couldn't take it any more. All the lies to myself and others. All the hidden secrets. I cried out to God ... "Jesus! (*Raising hands to heaven*) Cleanse me! Rip this sin from my life! Touch me and heal me. Make me whole. I am yours. Oh, Jesus, I can't do this without you."

And you know what? He answered my prayer. I felt almost a tearing in my side, as if something were leaving me. And I knew for the first time since I was a teenager that I was healed. Jesus did what I could not do. Now what else can I do but praise him? (*Picking up the rags and looking at them as if amazed*) He turned tattered rags into something beautiful. (*Smiling, referring to herself — she is now beautiful*) He delivered me, and I am devoted to him. No going back. Praise! Honor! Worship! He deserves it all! Even my small life ... because he is Lord. Lord of all.

OPTIONAL CHOIR SONG: About wholeness, healing, being made new, etc.

Sounds of Denial

PETER: (*Enters and stands by table with fake fire. A spotlight shines on him.*) I was standing by the fire trying to warm myself, but no matter what I did, it didn't seem to help. I was cold inside and out.

Not like so many days before. Days along the shoreline of the Sea of Galilee. Days of miracles, feeding thousands, healing the sick, followed by huge crowds! Warm, wonderful days when Jesus would pull us aside and share a special word with us.

One day we were around Caesarea Philippi and he asked us, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" (*Matthew 16:13*). I knew in a moment what Jesus meant.



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