

THE DECISION

by Winona Poole



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The Decision

A play for Holy Week

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

Simon

The leader of the Sanhedrin

Nathaniel

A soft-spoken man who commands
attention by his wisdom

Thomas

The one who has connections, sly as a fox

Nicodemus

The “secret disciple,” as portrayed in the Bible

Silas

An angry member who lost money because of Jesus

Azor

The questioner

Amos

The unsure supporter of Jesus

Pastor

Wraps up the performance

PRODUCTION NOTES

Synopsis: Your congregation becomes a meeting of the Sanhedrin. As the members rise and make their cases with increasingly impassioned responses, the congregation must decide what to do with Jesus and his alarming popular following. Then Nathaniel takes the floor. He proceeds to calmly appeal to the rational-thinking Sanhedrin, even quoting Scripture to prove his point that Jesus should be crucified. His “logical” arguments sway the tone of the meeting, and all agree to bring charges against Jesus.

Setting: The meeting of the Sanhedrin and the chief elders of the law. (For our production, we all met and sat in the sanctuary as usual. Even the cast members were interspersed throughout the congregation.) Simon is the chief elder who runs the meeting.

Time Period: Palm Sunday evening.

Staging: All speakers begin seated in the pews with the rest of the congregation. The idea is to give the congregation the feeling of being one of the Sanhedrin pondering the question of what to do about the problem of Jesus. Actors should remember to project their voices when rising from their seats and speaking. We set this up in the sanctuary rather than in a fellowship hall. It has more impact that way.

Purpose of Play: To help answer the question of how human beings move from the high of Palm Sunday to the low of Crucifixion in only one short week.

Suggested Use: In place of the sermon in an evening Palm Sunday worship service, or it may be used at any point during Holy Week.

Scripture Reference: Matthew 21:33-46.

Costuming: Casual men’s clothing, appropriate to the season and culture of the present day. We opted *not* to use biblical period costumes, because the point of the play is to have the congregation feel like they’re part of the Sanhedrin, part of the action, part of the decision-making. This preference turned out to be very effective.

1 *(SIMON should enter and stand at the pulpit to open the*
 2 *meeting. The rest of the CAST is seated among the*
 3 *congregation. As the CHARACTERS go to the pulpit one by*
 4 *one to share their concerns, Simon may simply stand off to*
 5 *one side.)*

6 **SIMON:** Elders, scribes, and fellow teachers of the law, I
 7 thank you for coming here this evening to discuss our
 8 concerns about this man Jesus, from Nazareth. *(The*
 9 *following should be overlapping dialog.)*

10 **NATHANIEL:** Concerns aren't the half of it.

11 **THOMAS:** He's a blasphemer.

12 **NICODEMUS:** The people think he is the Messiah.

13 **AZOR:** He's a danger to all of us!

14 **SILAS:** Did you see what happened this afternoon? He's a
 15 thief!

16 **SIMON:** Please, please, you'll have your opportunity to
 17 speak. I'm aware that many of you have concerns, but
 18 to expedite matters, I am suggesting that we come to
 19 the front one at a time to speak our minds so that all
 20 can hear. Then we will have all the information to make
 21 a wise decision. I agree it is time we deal with this
 22 situation, for the people who seem to follow this Jesus
 23 are getting out of hand.

24 **SILAS:** It's more than out of hand, Simon. Did you see how
 25 many thousands of people were out there this morning,
 26 laying down their cloaks and palm branches before him
 27 as if he were some kind of royalty?

28 **NICODEMUS:** But what if he *is* the Messiah as they say? We
 29 have to consider the possibility. I was there when he
 30 raised Lazarus from the grave. Who could do such a
 31 thing except by the power of God?

32 **THOMAS:** I say it was by the power of Beelzebub, not
 33 Jehovah. He is a master deceiver!

34 **AMOS:** But we don't know that for sure. How can you be so
 35 sure of that?

1 **SIMON:** Elders, scribes, teachers, please. There is much to
2 discuss tonight. We need all the facts. Let us hear the
3 reports first. Silas, you begin.

4 **SILAS:** *(Comes to pulpit or front where there is a microphone.*
5 *SIMON stands to one side as he speaks.)* Well, first of all,
6 everyone knows about this morning: *(Sarcastically)*
7 Jesus' great and triumphant entry into the city. I tell
8 you, it was disgraceful. The people were making fools
9 of themselves, laying down their cloaks as if some great
10 king were entering our city. And then this Jesus rides
11 in — on a donkey! Some king. But there's more. Jesus
12 rides to the temple and has the nerve to overturn the
13 tables of the merchants and the money-changers. There
14 were coins and merchandise strewn everywhere. Doves
15 meant for sacrifice were flying about the temple
16 grounds. It was absolute mayhem! Then he ran us all
17 off, refusing to let us even gather our wares. He cost
18 me at least a week's wages this afternoon. I have a
19 family to feed, but did Jesus think of that? No. He kept
20 ranting and raving about the temple being his Father's
21 house. His Father's house?! I say he's gone mad.

22 **THOMAS:** I told you, it's the devil. He is possessed.

23 **AMOS:** How can you say that? You were all there when he
24 gave the blind beggar sight. You heard him preach in
25 the temple.

26 **SILAS:** Maybe he started out as a good teacher, but he was
27 like a man possessed by a demon this afternoon.
28 Something must be done!

29 **SIMON:** Thank you, Silas. *(SILAS exits and takes his place in*
30 *the congregation. Pause)* Perhaps Nicodemus would like
31 to speak.

32 **NICODEMUS:** *(Rises and goes to the podium. Pauses before*
33 *speaking, as if trying to find the right words.)* I have met
34 with Jesus. He speaks with an authority and an
35 understanding of the Scriptures that I have never

1 encountered before. I understand, Silas, that Jesus'
 2 actions this afternoon caused you to lose wages, but don't
 3 you remember the days before we allowed the merchants
 4 on the temple grounds? People came to temple to worship
 5 God and to make sacrifices. There was not the concern
 6 for profits and promoting business. I may not agree with
 7 how Jesus handled the merchants, but he has made me
 8 question our wisdom concerning this matter.

9 SIMON: What of the people, Nicodemus?

10 NICODEMUS: The people? The people are entranced by Jesus,
 11 and they hang on his every word. But it's understandable.
 12 Haven't you heard him speak in the temple or on the
 13 hillsides? He speaks with wisdom that I am sure is from
 14 God. I don't believe we can dismiss the fact that he is a
 15 man blessed by God.

16 SIMON: Thank you, Nicodemus. (*NICODEMUS exits and returns*
 17 *to his seat in the congregation.*) Now, let's see — oh yes,
 18 Nathaniel.

19 NATHANIEL: (*Rises and goes to the podium.*) I appreciate your
 20 insights, Nicodemus, but I'm afraid that I agree with Silas.
 21 I, too, think Jesus is a dangerous man, but I believe so
 22 for different reasons. Whether it is intentional or not,
 23 Jesus' teachings are causing people to question our
 24 authority. They are undermining and eroding the very
 25 foundation of what God himself has established here. I
 26 have listened to his teachings, and he is extremely skilled.
 27 He persuades without asking the people to do anything.
 28 His stories seem innocent at first, but they cause
 29 dissention and questioning upon second thought. The
 30 people are drawn to him because of his magic tricks, but
 31 I don't think they realize how he is leading them astray.
 32 Why, he even admitted that he was not here to bring
 33 peace, but to cause fathers to be against their sons and
 34 mothers to be against their daughters!

35 AMOS: How can you call what he has done "magic tricks,"

- 1 Nathaniel? Can a magic trick raise a man from the dead
2 who's already started to decay?
- 3 THOMAS: I heard Lazarus wasn't really dead.
- 4 AMOS: That's a lie. I was there — I could smell the stench of
5 rotting flesh myself.
- 6 THOMAS: It could still be a trick. A rotting pig in the tomb
7 could fool you. There is no such thing as life after death,
8 so he could only have been deeply asleep before Jesus'
9 proposed miracle.
- 10 AMOS: What about all the other miracles? (*Stumbling*) He — he
11 healed the blind man at Bethsaida ... and at Gadara he
12 cast a demon out of a man and into the herd of swine,
13 causing the pigs to run off the cliff!
- 14 THOMAS: Maybe that's where he got his pig for the Lazarus
15 trick!
- 16 SIMON: Gentlemen, please — let Nathaniel finish.
- 17 NATHANIEL: Actually, you all prove my point. Even among
18 ourselves, this Jesus causes arguments. We cannot afford
19 this kind of division. The Romans only give us respect
20 because they fear our numbers and our unity of mind.
21 They already see how the Zealots have divided us. If they
22 see this Jesus dividing us even more, then we not only
23 risk losing our persuasive powers with our own people,
24 but with the Romans as well!
- 25 THOMAS: Nathaniel is right. We can't continue to let this
26 Jesus divide us. Don't you recall how God was angry with
27 our ancestors for the division among the tribes?
- 28 AZOR: But what are we to do? Jesus has too many followers.
29 We've tried questioning him, but you've seen how he uses
30 our own questions against us.
- 31 THOMAS: We must get rid of him somehow. (*Pause*) We could
32 have him assassinated.
- 33 SIMON: Assassinated?! Gentlemen, have you forgotten the
34 commandments of God that Moses brought down from
35 Mt. Zion?

1 NATHANIEL: If I may, Simon. (*Thoughtful pause*) I think it's
 2 merely a matter of getting the people to start
 3 questioning this Jesus. They are easily swayed. For
 4 now, Jesus is a celebrity. But if the Romans were to
 5 arrest him for something — anything — public opinion
 6 would change.

7 AMOS: But what if he *is* the Messiah, Nathaniel? Wouldn't
 8 we be guilty before God? You heard his story today
 9 about the evil farmers. They kept beating the vine
 10 owners' servants until the vine owner sent his son, and
 11 then they killed his son. You know Jesus was implying
 12 that we are the evil farmers and he is the beloved son.
 13 And the people believe he is the Son of God, too!

14 THOMAS: That's blasphemy!

15 NATHANIEL: I understand your concern, Amos, but I
 16 believe we must put our trust in God. Did not Solomon
 17 say that "God's children shall have a place of refuge"?
 18 Well, then, if this Jesus is a prophet of God and we are
 19 in the wrong, then certainly God will not allow any
 20 harm to come to him. But if we are correct and we do
 21 nothing, doesn't that heap more guilt upon our
 22 shoulders? God has given us the responsibility to lead
 23 his people, and we must do what we see as best.
 24 Certainly this division and warring among ourselves
 25 cannot be God's will.

26 AZOR: Then what can we do? (*Silence as ALL look at one*
 27 *another for a moment.*)

28 THOMAS: Judas.

29 NATHANIEL: Judas?

30 SIMON: Come up here, Thomas.

31 THOMAS: (*Rises and goes to the podium. NATHANIEL joins*
 32 *SIMON off to one side.*) Judas of Iscariot. He is one of
 33 Jesus' disciples. He has grown bitter about following
 34 Jesus' words of forgiveness and love toward everyone
 35 — even the Romans. He's also the keeper of the purse,

1 and a greedy one at that. For an amount of money —
2 say thirty pieces of silver or so — I wager that Judas
3 will help us.

4 **AZOR:** But what could the Romans possibly arrest Jesus
5 for?

6 **SILAS:** He could be arrested for stealing. Each of us lost
7 money at the temple this afternoon.

8 **SIMON:** But the temple money means nothing to the
9 Romans. No, it needs to be something only the Romans
10 would fear: the threat of rebellion — the loss of their
11 power.

12 **THOMAS:** Then we must convince the Romans that Jesus is
13 a threat.

14 **AZOR:** He has talked of himself as a king with a kingdom.
15 That could seem to be a threat to Caesar himself!

16 **SILAS:** But don't we need more than that?

17 **NATHANIEL:** Perhaps. I propose that we each watch for
18 anything that Jesus might say or do that we can use as
19 leverage to cause the Romans to arrest him. Once Jesus
20 is arrested, surely the people will begin to question this
21 Messiah business.

22 **AMOS:** But what if they don't? What if they still believe in
23 him? What if his following is stronger than you all
24 think?

25 **NATHANIEL:** I suggest again that we need to believe in the
26 judgment of God. If it is God's will to discredit this
27 Jesus, then surely a plan will open up to us. We must
28 be diligent in looking for ways to undermine Jesus
29 without losing the faith of our people. I am convinced
30 we will be given a way to get rid of this menace once
31 and for all.

32 **AMOS:** And what if they do more than just question him?
33 What if they flog him or, worse yet, what if they crucify
34 him? You know Pilate's been happy to crucify men for
35 the smallest of offenses.



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