

By What Authority

*Matthew 21:12-13,23-32;
Mark 11:15-18,27-33; Luke
19:45-48,20:1-19; John
2:13-25*



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*Year A Proper 21 ; Year B
Lent 3*

Parts by scene

■ = large part ▲ = medium sized part ● = small part

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
●	James - the most officious disciple, often the most frustrated with Jesus' unconventional decisions (such as his allowing women to join the group)	▲						
●	Phillip - one of the youngest disciples, always well-meaning and honestly curious, sometimes lacking in confidence	●						
●	Matthew - a former tax collector (i.e. a agent of the Roman occupation of his own people) who in his repentance from that past life is the most religiously fervent of the disciples	●						
▲	Jesus	●					▲	
■	Caiaphas - the high priest, a suave and amoral politician whose primary goal is the survival of the nation		▲		▲		▲	
▲	Priest - another highly ranked priest of the Temple concerned mostly with his own power		▲		▲		▲	
●	Elder - a member of the ruling council who's honestly undecided about who and what Jesus is		●		●			
▲	Nicodemus - a member of the ruling council who's a secret follower of Jesus		●		▲			
▲	Joanna - a wealthy woman with a perceptive and agile intellect who abandons her life as the co-manager of King Herod's household to follow Jesus			▲				
▲	Peter - the most headstrong disciple, and the least afraid of a fight, but never the smartest person in the room			▲				
■	Judas - possibly the deepest thinker and best organizer, the one who usually sees the big picture most clearly, and also the disciple with the best sense of humor			▲		▲		▲
■	Chuza - the open-minded, intellectually curious manager of Herod's household			■		▲		▲

•	Man -an anonymous worshiper at the Temple who's loudly critical of the priests						•	
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Scene 1

James , Jesus , Matthew , Phillip

{Jesus and the disciples on the streets of Jerusalem.}

James The Day has finally come! We've entered Jerusalem!

Phillip And nobody tried to stop us!

Matthew *[delightedly]* "Who shall stand when he appeareth?"

Jesus *[grimly]* "For he is a refining fire, and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver."

Phillip *[in a subdued voice, touched by Jesus' intensity]* Amen.

James *[with unaltered exuberance]* I have to admit, I thought the donkey colt was a weird choice, but it worked out great! Sitting up high on a horse wouldn't have gone over as well with the crowd.

Phillip *[still in awe, to Jesus]* You were their king.

Matthew He will be all men's king. And his Kingdom shall have no end.

James *[grandly]* Amen!

Jesus *[somberly]* Well. We have come to Jerusalem and entered its gates. Where shall we go now?

Matthew "The Lord you seek shall suddenly come to his temple."

Jesus Very well, then. To the Temple!

Scene 2

Caiaphas , Elder , Nicodemus , Priest

{The high priest and an associate meet with two of the city elders to discuss Jesus.}

Caiaphas *[with relish]* So, the day has come. Joshua of Nazareth has entered Jerusalem!

Priest *[in carefully neutral tones]* You sound almost happy about it. Does that mean you believe he is who he says he is?

Caiaphas Who does he say he *is*?

Priest *[taken aback]* Well - uh - I think it's pretty obvious!

Elder *[earnestly]* We've had some very disturbing reports on just that question.

Caiaphas *[casually]* I'm sure you have.

Priest You don't seem very concerned.

Caiaphas I'm concerned with anything that might threaten the safety of the nation.

Priest *[aggressively]* Then you agree this man should be arrested at once.

Nicodemus Arrested? I thought you called us here to participate in an *investigation*.

Elder *[to the priests in genuine curiosity and deference]* Have you already determined that he's a heretic on your own, then?

Priest Of course!

Caiaphas *[interrupting the priest]* Not at all.

{A pause while the groups takes in Caiaphas' contradicting the priest.}

Nicodemus *[hopefully]* Then you believe he's a righteous man?

Caiaphas I have no idea what he is, but we will find out soon, for he has come to Jerusalem. What he might have said or done in some backwater village means nothing. It's what happens here that counts. This is the heart of the nation, and what any man means to the nation can only be determined here.

Priest All right, then: what's our next step?

Caiaphas *[to the elders]* Watch him closely, and continue to collect your information on him. If he shows himself to be a danger to the nation, we'll deal with him.

Scene 3

Chuza , Joanna , Judas , Peter

{A group of the disciples makes its way to the Temple, where Jesus has gone.}

Joanna It's so good to be back in the city again! It's just like I remembered it.

Peter Enjoy it while you can, 'cause we're blowing this place up!

Judas *[anxiously]* I just wish he'd tell us more about how he's planning to do that.

Joanna I do, too. But on the other hand, it *is* more exciting this way.

{Chuza enters.}

Chuza *[drolly]* Yes! More exciting than seeing your husband, evidently.

Joanna *[throwing herself into his arms]* Chuza!

Chuza So you're real! I've dreamed about your return so often I couldn't be sure I wasn't seeing a mirage.

Joanna I'm sorry I didn't come to you at once. I was planning to, but as soon as we entered the city, the rabbi decided to go straight to the Temple, and I didn't want to miss it.

Chuza I tried to meet you when you made your big entrance into the city, but I couldn't get within a hundred feet of you because of the crowd.

Peter Wasn't that amazing? With support like that, there's no way we can lose!

Chuza *[starts to warn him, then changes his mind and pulls back]* I wouldn't - I certainly hope so.

Joanna *[to Chuza]* What's wrong? What were you about to say?

Chuza *[with a sigh]* Only that...I wouldn't count on that crowd for a whole lot if I were you, especially if it comes to a fight.

Judas *[grimly]* That's exactly what I was thinking.

Chuza Their enthusiasm was...real, but shallow. It wasn't close to anything like commitment, or even engagement.

Judas If they had joined us marching through the gates instead of cheering us from the side, I might be more hopeful. I did have some groups lined up that were ready to march with us, but I was overruled.

Chuza I also lined up quite a bit of support - not so much military as political. *[to Joanna]* Didn't you get my messages about that?

Joanna I did, but I was overruled as well.

Peter Hey, we'll be fine. The rabbi knows what he's doing.

Judas I just wish he'd let *us* know what he's doing.

Joanna John thinks the revolution won't be military or political at all, but spiritual. A changing of men's hearts.

Chuza Well, that's encouraging. We certainly have evidence of his abilities there.

Judas To some extent. We've seen him sway thousands one day, and then drive away would be followers with harsh or problematic talk the next. Your wife almost quit the group a few times over it, and I have to admit: I've thought about it, too.

Joanna *[thoughtfully]* Chuza, do you think -

Peter *[interrupting]* Hey, what's going on over there? That's the Temple, right?

Chuza It is. There seems to be some kind of commotion.

Judas It's a brawl! Look, that guy is chasing that other guy. Ouch! He just decked him!

Peter *[shouting to a man running by from the direction of the Temple]* Hey, you! What's going on over there?

{Peter temporarily exits.}

Chuza My God, now he's going after someone else. What's that he's wielding? It's not a sword...

Judas Does this happen often?

Chuza Never!

Joanna I hope the rabbi is all right.

{Peter re-enters.}

Peter He said some guy just went crazy and started trashing the place - and whipping people!

Judas Whipping?

Peter That's what he said.

Chuza Who was it? An distraught worshipper? A disgruntled vendor?

Peter This is the part you're not going to believe. It was a visiting rabbi!

Judas *[in sudden dread]* Oh my God. It can't be.

Joanna No! It couldn't!

Peter What? What's wrong?

Chuza *[grimly]* Did the man tell you anything else about this rabbi?

Peter Just that he arrived only this morning and - Oh!

Judas *[in despair]* No! No! No!

Chuza *[incredulously]* What is wrong with him?

Joanna It can't be him. It can't!

Peter *[joyfully]* What are you moaning about? Of course it's him! The fight has begun! Come on, let's join it!

{They all take off at a run toward the Temple.}

Scene 4

Caiaphas , Elder , Nicodemus , Priest

{The priests and elders discuss the reports about what Jesus did at the Temple.}

Priest Three vendors hospitalized! Seven others sent home with injuries! Thousands of dollars worth of damage. And the Temple desecrated! Desecrated!

Caiaphas *[coolly]* I'm fully aware of the contents of the report.

Nicodemus The Temple was not desecrated. The porch area where the moneychangers set up was damaged, but neither it nor they are a true part of the Temple.

Priest We have do something! The people are outraged!

Caiaphas Are they? *[to the elders]* Are they in fact?

Elder Actually, the people seem to approve of what he did.

Nicodemus Many dislike the moneychangers as much as he seems to.

Priest The moneychangers and dove sellers are an essential part of the Temple system! How else can foreign worshippers make their offerings?

Nicodemus *[meekly]* I'm just reporting the sentiments of the people.

Caiaphas *[to the elders]* Have you heard anything about the sentiments of the Romans?

Elder There's been no official communication, but one centurion I know dismissed this as an Israeli matter.

Caiaphas Good. We'll wait for an official reaction, but I think we should be all right for now.

Priest "All right for now"? Does that mean you're not going to do anything about this man?

Caiaphas What do you suggest?

Priest That we take a contingent of the Temple police and find this man and arrest him!

Nicodemus On what charge?

Priest Isn't it obvious? Destruction of property. Desecration of the Temple. Assault and battery!

Nicodemus It comes back to his claim and whether it's true. If he's the Messiah, then it was *his* Temple that he damaged.

Caiaphas And his people that he flogged?

Elder The Council has wrestled with this question, to no avail.

Priest Then we'll settle it once and for all. We'll confront him and force him into statements that will make it clear to all that he's just a nut.

Caiaphas Very well, we'll do as you suggest. You'll be in charge. It'll be your action to undertake. Agreed?

Priest Absolutely!

Scene 5

Chuza , Judas

{Chuza and Judas discuss what Jesus did at the Temple.}

Chuza This is bad.

Judas It was the worst thing he could have done.

Chuza He did win the sympathy of the people.

Judas Yeah, but against the wrong enemy.

Chuza The priests play a big role in stabilizing Roman rule.

Judas But the people don't understand that. All this will do is further divide us against ourselves.

Chuza I suppose you're right. And now, your "messiah's" ministry is certainly dead, and maybe he is, too. Those priests are going to arrest him at the very least.

Judas That might not be so easy. I've seen him perform some amazing miracles. He may yet have some trick for escaping their nets, though I'm not even sure if I should hope for that at this point.

Chuza In that case, there's someone I want you to meet, if you can get away. Someone who might be able to help us contain the damage if your worst case scenario materializes.

Judas All right, I'll come to your house tomorrow night.

Scene 6

Caiaphas , Jesus , Man , Priest

{The priests confront Jesus at the Temple the next day.}

Priest You! Stop right where you are!

Jesus *[mildly]* Good morning.

Priest You're the one who attacked the vendors on this very spot the other day, aren't you?

Jesus I am.

Man Good for you! Drive them all out!

Priest What gave you the right to attack the Temple of God and disrupt the worship of the good people who come here? By what authority are you even preaching right now?

Jesus I'll answer that question if you'll answer one of mine.

Priest Fine!

Jesus By what authority did John baptize? Was it of God or man?

{A long pause.}

Man Come on! What's your answer?

Priest *[whispering to Caiaphas]* What do we say?

Caiaphas *[smoothly]* Don't ask me. This is your operation, remember? And I would have thought you'd know the answer to that question.

Priest He was a fraud, of course! But I can't say that out loud! The people loved John.

Caiaphas *[with blatantly fake sympathy]* You're in a tough spot. And if you say instead that John came from God, then he'll ask you why you then opposed him.

Priest *[hissing]* You set me up!

Caiaphas *[with a bit of an edge]* On the contrary: you set yourself up! You were the one who wanted to confront the man straightway, remember? And now, I think you'd better answer him quickly, or the people will begin to have their doubts about you.

{A pause while the priest struggles to think of a safe answer.}

Priest *[to Jesus]* I don't know!

Jesus Then I won't tell you by what authority I do what *I* do. But maybe you'll find it easier to answer this: a man had two sons and told the first one to go work in the fields, and though the boy refused at first, he later repented and went on out. Then the man told his second son to go work in the fields, but though the boy said Yes, he never did go. Now, which of the two did the will of his father?

Man Ha! You tell 'em!

Jesus Tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the Kingdom of Heaven ahead of you, because John came in righteousness and they believed him, but you did not.

Man Tax collectors before the priests. I love it!

Caiaphas *[to the priest]* Allow me to salvage the encounter. *[politely to Jesus]* Excuse me!

Jesus Would you like to ask me another question?

Caiaphas *[in a loud voice so the crowd can hear]* Yes. And I ask it on behalf of all these people. Will you show us a sign that proves your divine call? As all the prophets of old used to do?

Man Yes! A sign! A sign! You show 'em, rabbi!

Jesus Very well. Destroy this temple, and I will raise it up in three days!

{The crowd goes crazy.}

Man I love it! "Destroy this temple." Let's do it!

Priest *[to Caiaphas]* He just threatened to destroy the Temple! Clearly a capital offense!

Caiaphas It's by no means clear he was referring to the literal Temple. Nevertheless, such a charge will almost certainly be effective. *If* he proves to be a threat to the nation.

Scene 7

Chuza , Judas

{Judas visits Chuza at his home.}

Judas I can't believe they didn't arrest him!

Chuza You were right; he had some tricks up his sleeve. He might accomplish something here after all.

Judas No. I'm more convinced than ever that he won't. He's gotten into a head butting contest with the priests, and forgotten all about the Romans. After the encounter at the Temple, he was approached by some of the groups I'd lined up to help us, begging him to claim the kingship and lead us to freedom. He turned them all away.

Chuza No!

Judas And it gets worse. If he loses his battle with the priests, then he loses and that's it. You and I would be out a lot of time and money, and maybe even our lives, but that would be the extent of the damage. But what if he wins? What if he comes close to overturning the power of the priests?

Chuza *[in sudden horrified realization]* The Romans would intervene.

Judas Exactly. And the nation could end up in a worse state than we are even now.

Chuza I guess you still want to talk to my friend, then.

Judas Yeah. We might need all the help we can get to *stop* the rabbi if it comes to that.

Chuza Very well. *[calling into the next room]* You can come on out, old friend.

{A man enters the room.}

Judas You!

Chuza Judas Iscariot, allow me to formally introduce you to Caiaphas, the high priest of Israel.

*You can read my thoughts about this play and respond with your own at
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