

Taken



*Matthew 24:37-44; Luke
17:26-37*

Year A Advent 1

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Parts by scene

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

		1	2
▲	Phillip - one of the youngest disciples, always well-meaning and honestly curious, sometimes lacking in confidence	■	
▲	Thomas - the skeptic, who really wants to believe because of his emotional bond with the others, but can't simply ignore his doubts	▲	
▲	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	▲	●
▲	James - the most officious disciple, often the most frustrated with Jesus' unconventional decisions (such as his allowing women to join the group)	▲	
▲	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	▲	
■	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	■	
●	John - the gentlest and most caring of the disciples		●
▲	Jesus		▲
●	Peter - the most headstrong disciple, and the least afraid of a fight, but never the smartest person in the room		●
●	Mary Magdalene - a 'fallen woman' who became the first female disciple, the humblest member of the group due to her shame about her past		●

Scene 1

James , Joanna , Judas , Matthew , Phillip , Thomas

{Phillip wakes up in the morning by the campfire all alone.}

Phillip

[with a yawn] That was the coldest night in a month! I thought the weather was supposed to be getting - *[looking around, realizes no one else is there]* and I'm talking to myself. *[getting up and looking around]* Where is everybody? Hello? *[notices all the unpacked rolls and tents]*

around him.] What a mess! Everybody's always nagging me to fold up my bedding in the morning and here they all leave theirs out. It's like they just...Oh no! It can't be! Oh no, oh no, oh no! Hello? Anybody! Where are you? *[sees nobody in the vicinity]* They're gone! Just like he said. And I'm *left*. Why me? Why me? Help! Help!

{Some of the others come jogging out of the woods}

Thomas What's wrong?

Phillip *[startled by their appearance]* Aaaagggghh! *[relieved]* Oh my goodness I'm glad you're still here. *[suddenly alarmed again]* Where's everybody else? Have you seen them? The rabbi's gone!

Joanna He got up early and decided to go into the town without telling anyone, but Mary saw him leaving and woke the rest of us. We all bolted out of our beds to chase him down. I'm surprised you slept through it.

James What are you so freaked out about?

Phillip I thought you all had been...*[suddenly embarrassed]* *taken*.

James "Taken"?

Phillip Yeah, like the rabbi was telling us yesterday.

Judas What, you mean about the two men in the field and the cooking women?

Phillip Yes! And I thought you'd all been taken. I thought I was the only one...left.

James I don't see what you were worried about. We haven't even entered Jerusalem yet.

Phillip Jerusalem? You mean the rabbi was talking about Jerusalem yesterday? I thought he was talking about the end of the world, and I thought...well, I thought this was it.

Judas *[with disgust]* I can't believe we're doing this again!

Phillip Doing what?

Thomas *[to Phillip]* A few days ago, the rabbi was predicting things that would happen in the future, and we didn't know whether he was talking about our entry into Jerusalem or the end of the world. *[dryly]* There was a *long* debate.

Phillip That happened before yesterday's talk?

James Yesterday was the rabbi resolving the disagreement. Matthew cornered him and asked him directly.

Joanna He did? How did I miss it?

Matthew I'm sorry. You and Thomas were still in the town. He was in a talkative mood and it was just him and me at first, and so I jumped at the chance.

Joanna That's all right. So the answer is Jerusalem.

{James and Matthew answer at the same time.}

James *[simultaneously with Matthew]* Yup!

Matthew *[simultaneously with James]* No!

Judas *[to Matthew]* What do you mean, No?

Matthew It was clear to me this time that he was talking about the end of the world.

Judas But he said, "When the Son of Man comes!" Everything he said was about what would happen when he comes to Jerusalem.

Matthew That was just the first thing you heard. The conversation began before that, with just him and me, and from that part, I became certain he was talking about the end of the world.

James What do you mean "from that part"? Did he ever say directly that it was the end of the world?

Matthew Well...not in so many words.

Thomas *[in mock despair]* Here we go again!

Judas *[oddly urgent]* Why didn't you pin him down? I assumed you had already done that by the time we showed up. Didn't you realize how crucial it was?

Joanna *[more gently]* Matthew, what did he say this time that made you think he was talking about the end of the world?

Matthew He spoke of wars and famine and earthquakes.

James *[dismissively]* He did last time, too, and we decided they fit either interpretation!

Thomas But the earthquakes were a little harder to fit into the Jerusalem theory, if I recall correctly. They really seem more like an end-of-the-world kind of thing, don't they?

Judas *[impatiently to Matthew]* What else did he say?

Matthew More of what he said that first day. That we'd be betrayed and persecuted, that there'd be fake Messiahs, and so forth. I guess that could go either way, too. But then he said that the news of the Kingdom would spread through the entire world, and then the End would come.

Phillip *[ominously]* The End.

Matthew That's what convinced me more than anything else that he was talking about the end of the world.

Joanna It certainly sounds like it.

James I'm beginning to think so, too!

Judas *[argumentatively]* No! It could still refer to our mission. What he's telling us is that it will be bigger than even we think. That it will be about more than just Israel, that it'll overtake the entire world. That it'll take much longer than we imagine. And that it won't be at all easy at first. We will be arrested, executed, persecuted. It will be a long, tough haul.

Phillip What about the End? What else can that be other than the end of the world?

Judas It just means the end of the struggle. The Kingdom won't come in until all the whole terrible struggle has played out.

James But that means we might not be there to see it! We might be killed, or it might not happen for another generation.

Judas I hope we all knew that was a possibility when we signed on. All who fight for justice fight for the future, for something outside of themselves.

James Wait! Didn't he promise us once that we'd sit by his side when he came into his kingdom? That means we can't be killed, and it can't take longer than our lifetimes!

Thomas Maybe he's revised his estimate. Maybe he's thinking it'll be much harder now.

Matthew Now that we're so much closer and can see the lay of the land as it were.

Thomas Exactly. Or maybe - now don't jump on me for this, I'm just leaving no stone unturned! - maybe he just promised we'd rule to get us to join him.

James *[apoplectic]* Don't jump on you? You're damn right we're going to jump on you! Do you know what you're saying?

Phillip *[trying to head off the coming rant]* Boy, I don't know what to believe! Every time someone makes their case, it sounds so convincing.

Joanna *[to Matthew, joining Phillip in an attempt to keep the discussion civil]* Did the rabbi say anything else?

Matthew Not to me. The others joined us at that point, and they heard everything else he said.

Joanna *[to the others]* And he went on to give more teachings about...whatever it is?

James *[grumpily letting go of his rage]* Yeah, that's where all the "taken" stuff came in that spooked Phillip.

Phillip It *still* spooks me! He said that two men might be working together in a field and - boom! - one of them would be taken. Or

two women might be cooking together and - boom! - one of them taken.

Joanna Or a group of people camping together, and in the morning, boom, everybody except you: taken!

Phillip I know it must sound silly now, but when it was happening: boy was I scared!

Thomas But what does it even mean to be taken?

Phillip Um. I'm not sure exactly. All I knew was that I didn't want to be left behind!

Matthew Wait a minute. You saw being taken as a good thing?

Phillip Well, yeah. *[looks around]* Was I way off about that? I mean, he was talking about the Ark, right? And how Noah and his family were saved while everybody else was left behind. Wouldn't "taken" mean "taken aboard the Ark?"

Matthew *[teacherly]* No, no. Don't forget: he also spoke about Sodom and Gomorrah and how they were destroyed by fire, while Lot and his family escaped. In both stories, the people of the world are just going about their business, unsuspecting, *un-watchful*, when Judgment Day falls upon them. And it was the ones with foresight and watchfulness who escaped. So if you're one of two men working in the fields, be the one who's alert! And if you see the judgment coming, don't try to run back to the house to get your things. That is: don't try to save any little bit of your old life. Instead, let it go and flee for the mountains. Or the Ark. Flee to where you'll be saved. Don't let yourself be *taken* - overcome, run to ground, destroyed - by disaster.

Thomas Wow. Now it all makes sense to me!

Joanna Judas, I'm curious: how do you interpret all this as being about Jerusalem?

Judas It's very simple. There are people "eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage" right now in Jerusalem, in all of Israel, even in the palaces and barracks of the Romans, all in blissful ignorance. They have no idea what's about to happen. But the Day will come upon them like a storm, like a Flood, like fire and brimstone from the sky. And the "taken" is literal. Men

and women will die in the coming conflict, in the fields and kitchens and everywhere else. *[to Matthew]* Don't *you* forget the last thing the rabbi said. We asked him where these people would be "taken," and he said, "You can always find the corpses by following the vultures."

Matthew *[thoughtfully]* I hadn't considered that.

Phillip *[to Judas]* What does the Ark mean in your interpretation?

James *[jumping in]* It means us! We're the ones who have been watchful. We spotted the rabbi and joined him. We got on board with him! So that must mean we're going to survive, right?

Judas Maybe. The important thing is that we win.

Matthew Amen to that, whatever the rabbi was speaking of. May the nation find its renewal. May we all stand justified at the Judgment. May the world complete its long life some day to the glory of God.

everybody Amen!

Scene 2

Jesus , Joanna , John , Mary , Peter

{Later that day, Joanna comes across Jesus, John, Mary, and Peter in conversation.}

John Joanna! Come join us. The rabbi is explaining his words from yesterday.

Joanna He is? The others were just debating that! Hold on just a minute and I'll fetch them.

Jesus Sit, Joanna. Let's talk a little first, and then you can call over the others if you like, or go report to them what we say.

Peter Yeah, we do *not* want any debates!

Mary We're having a wonderful talk. Please stay!

{Joanna sits.}

Jesus What were they debating about?

Joanna Whether you were talking about our entering Jerusalem or the end of the world when you were talking yesterday about being taken, or the other day about the destruction of the temple and the signs of the times.

Jesus The world is always about to enter Jerusalem. Which is to say: the world is always about to end. And the day will come when that which is always about to happen, happens.

Mary Will that Day be a good thing or bad?

Jesus That day will be a winnowing fan that separates the wheat from the chaff. The world is continually expanding - and coming to a point.

John What must we do to stand well on that day? Or to avoid it, if it's something to be avoided?

Jesus Pray fervently that you never see that Day! Pray fervently for it to come! It will come to every life.

Peter *[with good humor]* I have no idea what you're talking about, but I love hearing you talk!

Jesus Behold the pure in heart! Truly I tell you: you will follow me to a place no one else will go.

Peter *[pleased with himself]* Not even John?

John Peter!

Joanna But it's true, John. You're the most devoted follower among us. If there's a place you won't be able to go, I don't want to know about it!

Mary *[privately to Jesus]* Will I fail you, too?

Jesus Never! But I might fail *you*.

Mary By going somewhere I can't follow?

Jesus *[to everybody]* Those who try to save their lives will lose them. Those who follow me - will come to Jerusalem.

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