

Between Two Thieves written by Leigh Riches. Based on a concept by Phil Jones.
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Between Two Thieves

Stage: Empty except for two raised blocks on either side. Possibly a drop of fabric (screen) with a shadow of a cross projected on it in between the two blocks.

Lighting: Fairly tight and low throughout the drama so that walls past the edge of the stage remain in darkness. Some coloured lighting used for effect throughout the drama.

Cast (5) : Two thieves - ILAN and YAAKOV, A Scribe, A Roman Centurion and Mary (Jesus mother)

Costuming : The thieves wear all black, while the other three characters could wear period clothing or colours representing themselves (ie. Scribe - Gold, Centurion - Red, Mary - Blue.

The three phases - The drama has three phases that it transitions through. **The first** is the conversation between two thieves as they discuss their crimes and the nature of the man between them - who he is, what he has done. **The second phase** sees the thieves (begging to tire) interacting with three people attending the crucifixion, and the **thirds and final phase** see the Thieves (exhausted, on their last legs) talking to Jesus himself.

Introduction: (can be read by pastor as an introduction)

(The Bible tells us that) After Jesus was arrested he was put on trial before the Jewish Council, Governor Pilate, and King Herod. No-one could find any reason to imprison him, let alone crucify him. But a group of priests and leaders persuaded the crowd to ask for Jesus to be put to death.

So the Governor ordered that Jesus be whipped with a lead-tipped whip, and then turned him over to the Roman soldiers.

Some of the soldiers beat Jesus about his head with sticks, spitting on him and mocking him. Finally, when they grew tired of this, they led him away to be crucified.

They made Jesus to carry a heavy wooden cross through the streets of Jerusalem and took him to a nearby hill called "Golgotha" or "The place of the Skull".

It was here that Jesus first saw the two other men who were to be crucified alongside him that day..... one on his right, and one on his left. We don't know their names, we don't know exactly why they were being crucified,but we do know that in those few hours, while they were hanging on crosses in front of an unruly crowd, that a remarkable conversation took place..... A conversation between two thieves.....

Phase 1:

(Setting) *The stage is dark, then the sounds of nails being pounded and possibly screams is played (audio only) while still in darkness. The roar of the crowd is heard and as the light come up (to a medium-low level only) the crowd audio gradually dies down. The two thieves are standing on raised blocks on either side of the stage with 3-4 metres between them. The thieves, dressed in black and with their faces dirty and perhaps scratched are standing on the blocks with arms out-stretched, this is how they stand as they deliver their first 4 or 5 lines.)*

ILAN: (panick) I don't want to die..... please..... somebody, please..... help me.... anybody..... (he gives up and half whispers) " I don't want to die..... I'm sorry

YAAKOV: (bitter) It's too late for being sorry now ILAN, they've put us here to die,..... they don't care about us now..... don't waste your energy.

ILAN: YAAKOV - I'm scared - I don't want to die - not like this..... when we talked in the prison, I was brave... I'm not brave now..... The people.... they keep looking at me... staring at me..... (shouting) **what are you looking at....**

YAAKOV: ILAN, these people are here to **watch** us die,.... to look down on us If I'd had the chance I would have stolen much more..... **from all of you...**

ILAN: (being coaxed)Yes.... I stole too.....I stole 8 pieces of gold from the temple...The food YAAKOV,..... the food I bought with that money.... and the clothes..... I was rich.....

YAAKOV: (bragging) I had cattle.... and sheep as well.... I stole some of the finest goats in Jerusalem. No one was more cunning than I ... I became wealthier than most people here. I stood and watched others die on this hill..... until they caught me.....

ILAN: Look at this crowd.... these people are crazy.....

YAAKOV: Crazy is right..... they wanted Barabbas, Barabbas the murderer they set free... YAAKOV the goat stealer they crucify..... they are out of their minds.... It should have been me that was set free.....

(both men become aware for the first time of the (imaginary) 'man' between them and turn to look at him as they speak now to him their arms drop slowly to their sides. The scene now set to the audience allows them to be more natural)

YAAKOV: (looks to where Jesus would be, and then up at the (imaginary) sign above his head, reading it) You..... hey you.... 'King Man' who **are** you.... I've not seen **you** in prison.....why are **you** here.....

ILAN: (pause) I know of this man - This is the one they swapped for Barabbas, (nodding to the crowd) they wanted **this man** dead in place of Barabbas.

YAAKOV: A man worse than Barabbas? How many has he killed?....What's his name?

ILAN: The people call him Jesus... I've heard about him....

YAAKOV: You **know** him... What did he do?

ILAN: (shaking his head) I don't know him - I've heardstories....

YAAKOV: Ahh... a criminal with a reputation that precedes him.... His crimes must be well known so that's why this crowd hates him so much... I've never seen a man beaten to within an inch of his life **before** he is crucified...

ILAN: The stories I've heard..... they say he was a **good** man.....

YAAKOV: You've been up her too long ILAN.... no-one kills a good man like this he was obviously a **crazy man** - he thought he was a **king**.... (both men laugh)

ILAN:I heard he was from Nazareth... the son of a carpenter.

YAAKOV: (the 'in' joke) **Nazareth**.....Can any **good** thing come out of **Nazareth**?

ILAN: (agreeing) I know..... It's just that..... well..... (to YAAKOV)you haven't heard **anything** about Jesus of Nazareth?

YAAKOV: No..... Sorry.... I've been tied up lately.....

ILAN: ... they say... that he had..... well..... powers....

YAAKOV: Powers?

ILAN: (shrugging) Something.....news travels....., stories..... well... maybe they were made up but it was said that he healed men who were blind..... that he fed thousands in a single day.... that he even made dead people live again.... these are the stories I've heard of this man.....

[Lighting goes down and stage is dark.]

[Video footage projected from "Visual Bible" or "Jesus Video" of some of the events just talked about. (5-10 minutes), finishing with a montage of clips of Jesus close up, smiling etc.]

[When the lighting comes back up, the thieves have their arms raised again, crucifixion style)

[Phase 2 begins.... occasionally the thieves are short of breath as they speak and begin to look more visually uncomfortable)

YAAKOV: (mocking) **This man**.... **This man** did all those things.... you are going crazy ILAN.

ILAN: (shrugging again) This is what I've heard....

YAAKOV: If this man has done all this why would they kill him in such a way (A Scribe comes by) (calling out) Hey you (Scribe looks up in disgust at the criminal) Who is this man with us - what has he done?

Scribe: I do not answer the questions of common criminals.

YAAKOV: This man says he is your king and you kill him?...

Scribe: (enraged) **He is not our King....** he **said** he was the the king of the Jews. The man you speak of is a **liar**. He said he could destroy the Temple and build it again in three days.....He spoke and ate with sinners and the unclean, he had **no** respect for the Holy Sabbath. How can a man with clearly no understanding and adherence to the Law claim to be even **remotely** associated with the **God** of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

ILAN: But didn't this man do **some** good.?

Scribe: Trickery.... that's all it was,... trickery plain and simple. This man was a fraud with cleverly staged tricks to deceive the foolish. If he had any power at all it was the power of the **evil one** which he used.

ILAN: But... they say he healed people of great sickness..... they they even say he had power over the dead.....

Scribe: Absurd..... (mocking) He saved others but he cannot save himself?.... So he is the king of Israel, is he? Let him come down from the cross, and we will believe in him!

ILAN: Does he not worship.... the same God as you all?

Scribe: He trusted God? --let God show his approval by delivering him! (even more disgust) for he said...'I am the Son of God'. (Scribe exits stage)

YAAKOV: (incredulous & mocking) Son of God?..... (laughing) you are the Son of God are you (yelling) **Look at you** is this how God treats his Son?....

(Play Audio "Father forgive them for they know not what they do")

(Centurion walks on stage)

Centurion: Enough with your yelling.... Have some respect and die in peace.

YAAKOV: How courageous the Roman army is, yelling insults at dying men...

Centurion: (The Centurion strikes YAAKOV with a stick) I said be quiet.... you should be more like this man (Pointing toward where Jesus would be) He had no foul mouth like you.

ILAN: So what did he do..... to be beaten in such a way?

Centurion: (pauses for a while) This man was a trouble maker - He made a mockery of **your** beliefs and the beliefs of the Roman Empire. He pronounced himself a King - there is no king but Ceasar.

YAAKOV: And for this he dies?

Centurion: His own people wanted him dead. Every man and woman was **screaming** for his crucifixion before Pilate himself. They didn't want this 'king' and neither does Herod or Ceasar..... He wanted to be a king.... well we made him a king... (laughing)... Did you not see the royal robe we gave him, the sign we put above him, and the royal crown of thorns we placed on his head..... We made this crazy man a king, just like he wanted.

ILAN: But didn't you fear..... haven't you heard of his.... powers.

Centurion: Powers.... (laughs)... this man is nothing but a common lunatic. He claims to know all - but when we blindfolded him and beat him with sticks saying "Tell us King - Who hit you" he said nothing. He did not even make a defense for himself before Pilate. This man has no power over his tongue let alone anything else.
(To Jesus) If you are the King of the Jews..... **Save yourself.**
(laughs and exits.)

YAAKOV: (to ILAN) so this powerful man of yours turn out to be nothing more that a **fraud**.... No-one cares about him..... no-one even **liked** the man.

(A woman enters and stands a distance from the 'cross' - she has been crying and is physically exhausted)

YAAKOV: (sees the woman, nods to ILAN and then calls out) Woman.... **Woman**.... (she half looks toward him) You know this man?... he was a fraud.... why then do you cry for him?

(No answer from her)

ILAN: (a little more gentler than YAAKOV) Woman.... You **know** this man?

Mary: (nodding and sobbing) I know this man.

YAAKOV: Don't waste your tears on this man - we've hard all about him.

Mary: (starting quietly but getting more confident) You've heard all about him?..... Have you heard how he cared for those who were sick,.... how he spoke to the little ones..... how he spent time with those that had no-one.....

YAAKOV: Are you sure this the same man? You can hardly recognise him.... besides he's clearly crazy - He thinks he's a king.

Mary: He didn't behave like a king - not like any king that I know..... He had no palace, no money, ... only the clothes he wore. He didn't demand to be served by others... instead he served them. He didn't speak like the pharisees and rulers... instead he used plain language,... stories to explain about God.

ILAN: So.... you believe he had powers.

Mary: I saw a man change water into wine, a man who made blind people see, a man who gave back life to a dead person. He was not an ordinary man.

ILAN: Woman....who....are you?

[Audio of Jesus talking - "Woman..... behold your son."]

(Mary exits)

Phase 3 begins..... [Here the lighting lowers to a different softer, the two thieves are now taking longer between each line, taking deep breath's and are clearly in pain - their arms are raised again crucifixion style]

YAAKOV: (calling after her) - You foolish woman..... this man has deceived you..... he's a mad-man

ILAN: YAAKOV, What sort ofmad-man diesfor what he believes?

YAAKOV: That shows how crazy he is.... he really believes he is.... God.....

ILAN: YAAKOV..... what will happens to us when we die....?

YAAKOV: How..... should I know?..... You should have asked... that religious man or ask your mad friend here.

ILAN: Do you..... do you..... regret having stolen all those cattle and sheep now..... are you... **sorry**.....

YAAKOV: (pauses) No..... they deserved to get their livestock stolen..... besides.... they had plenty more.....

ILAN: I'm sorry.....

YAAKOV: What.....

ILAN:I'm..... sorry I stole that money.....

YAAKOV: You mean..... you're sorry that you got **caught**.....

ILAN:no..... I'm sorry.... that I did wrong.....

YAAKOV: You're crazy too.... you both are....

ILAN: (nodding toward where Jesus would be) No.... **he's** not crazy....
..... how did he heal people..... perform miracles.... and yet.... he
allows these people to kill him without protest..... YAAKOV.... I
think.... he might be.... who he said he was..... The Messiah.

YAAKOV: (long pause, laughs, then angrily) So you're the **Messiah**, are
you?Prove itby saving yourself--.....and us, too, while
you're at it!"

ILAN: Don't you fear God..... even when you are dying?.... We
deserve..... to die for our evil deeds,..... but this man hasn't
done anything wrong.....

(pause)

Jesus, remember mewhen you come into your
Kingdom.....

Jesus: (**Audio** only) I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise.

*(the sound of a rumbling earthquake begins and then dies
away.... The lighting changes to Red)*

Jesus: (**Audio** only) My God, my God, why have you forsaken
me?

*(the earthquake sound begins again, this time very loud...
and then all the lights cut leaving the stage in darkness.)*

End.

*Message to follow should focus on a 'Liar, Lunatic, Lord' message.