

Saturday

ACT 1

Darkness. On the screen, Hans Holbein's painting *The Body of the Dead Christ in the Tomb* appears on the screen.

NARRATOR: The picture "represented Christ just taken down from the cross. It seems to me that painters as a rule represent the Saviour, both on the cross and taken down from it, with great beauty still upon His face. This marvelous beauty they strive to preserve even in His moments of deepest agony and passion. But there was no such beauty in Rogojin's picture. This was the presentment of a poor mangled body which had evidently suffered unbearable anguish even before its crucifixion, full of wounds and bruises, marks of the violence of soldiers and people, and of the bitterness of the moment when He had fallen with the cross—all this combined with the anguish of the actual crucifixion.

"The face was depicted as though still suffering; as though the body, only just dead, was still almost quivering with agony. The picture was one of pure nature, for the face was not beautified by the artist, but was left as it would naturally be, whosoever the sufferer, after such anguish.

"I know that the earliest Christian faith taught that the Saviour suffered actually and not figuratively, and that nature was allowed her own way even while His body was on the cross. "It is strange to look on this dreadful picture of the mangled corpse of the Saviour, and to put this question to oneself: 'Supposing that the disciples, the future apostles, the women who had followed Him and stood by the cross, all of whom believed in and worshipped Him—supposing that they saw this tortured body, this face so mangled and bleeding and bruised (and they *must* have so seen it)—how could they have gazed upon the dreadful sight and yet have believed that He would rise again?'

From *The Idiot* by Fyodor Dostoyevsky

The lights rise dimly. PETER and JOHN sit apart upon a stage empty except for a few chair. They are pensive, withdrawn, and say nothing at first. Peter breaks the silence.

PETER: You saw it?

JOHN: Yes.

PETER: Did he really--? It's not some sort of trick?

JOHN: He's dead.

PETER: He raised others from the dead. Couldn't he--?

JOHN: (angrily) He's dead! I saw the nails. I saw the blood. I heard his tortured breath. Where were *you*, Peter?

PETER: I—I couldn't.

JOHN: / was there. I saw it. All of it.

PETER: He always loved you best.

JOHN: What does that matter now?

PETER: You don't deny it.

JOHN: No, I—you're the one he'd have take his place. Keep it going.

PETER: Keep what going?

JOHN: (motions helplessly)

PETER: There is nothing without him. He was the one. The Messiah, the Christ! He held eternal life in his hands. (realizing he's dead) I thought he did.

JOHN: We all thought so.

PETER: He did. Do you think we were all deceived? No! I saw who he was. We all did. Do you remember Jairus' daughter? They said she was dead, but what did *he* say? She was asleep, he said. Asleep! Don't you remember how they laughed at him, and how embarrassed we felt, because she must be dead. No one mistakes the living for the dead. Not parents. They had every reason to hope she was alive, and they said she was dead. And he took her hand, he took it like this, and he said, Arise! And she rose. She woke up. We saw that, you and I. We saw it with our own eyes. Was that a lie? Was she only sleeping?

JOHN: No.

PETER: Yes, exactly—no. She was not sleeping. Rabbi is (faltering) He was...

JOHN: No one mistakes the living for the dead, Peter.

PETER: Did you feel his body when it was taken down? Did you hold your hand over his mouth to feel for breath?

JOHN: No. I had other responsibilities.

PETER: Other responsibilities? More important than burying our Teacher?

JOHN: Yes.

PETER: (waits for an explanation)

JOHN: When a person is about to die, his last words, they matter. I was there, watching him die, watching him struggle for breath, and his mother was there with me. And he looked at me. In the midst of that agony he looked at me and said to her, in a rasping voice, Woman, here's your son. And he said to me, gasping, Behold, you mother. (pause) He knew it was the end, Peter.

Mary walks in solemnly.

PETER: Mary, where have you been?

She turns away, not wanting to speak.

PETER: Mary, you saw it? You watched?

She nods.

JOHN: (to PETER) She remained after I left. (to Mary) You saw him taken down, didn't you?

MARY: Yes. Joseph got permission, and he laid him in his own tomb.

PETER: Did you notice anything unusual?

MARY: What do you mean?

JOHN: He thinks he isn't dead.

PETER: He can't be dead.

JOHN: Everything dies, Peter. Men die, beasts die, empires die, dreams die. We are from dust and to dust we return.

PETER: Don't talk like that.

MARY: Like what, Peter? Like someone who saw a good man die? My hands still have his blood on them. He had wounds in his palm, in his feet, skin flayed to strips on his back, blood-matted hair from that crown they gave him. They gashed him in the side. You've seen crucifixions, Peter. We all have. This was worse. When they let him down, he was heavy, lifeless, gaunt, cold, with dead eyes gazing helplessly. He's gone.

Silence.

PETER: Do you remember when we heard the news about Lazarus, that he was sick? Rabbi turned to us and said, This will not lead to death. And when we arrived, they told us Lazarus was dead, that he had been dead four days. Rabbi still wanted to see. He told them to open the tomb. Do you remember? The body should have already been decaying. And when they opened the tomb, he said, Lazarus, come out! And out he came, with his burial clothes still on. With his word, just a few words, he raised a dead man. We've talked with him and eaten with him. We know Lazarus is alive.

MARY: Peter, don't do this.

PETER: He isn't dead, Mary. He's asleep.

MARY: And who will wake him, Peter? You? Even God forsook him. He cried out—but you weren't there. You didn't hear. He cried out to ask why God had forsaken him.

PETER: I don't believe it. He's not dead.

JOHN: He told us, didn't he? He kept trying to tell us. He said he would be killed. You heard him, Peter. And what did you do? You told him, No! Never! It'll never happen, Master! Never! What did he say to you then?

PETER: It doesn't matter. He said he would rise again. Isn't that what he said?

MARY: What did he tell you, Peter? I wasn't there.

JOHN: Rabbi called him Satan and told him to get out of his way. Isn't that what he said, Peter?

PETER: What does it matter? He said he would be raised to life again!

MARY: I don't think you understand. You want him to live. I do, too. But prophets don't come back to life. God may raise his spirit, somehow. I don't know. Elijah was caught up to

heaven and Enoch walked with God. Lazarus lives, but he died of an illness. Rabbi's body—it's broken, Peter. You didn't see it.

PETER: Stop saying that.

JOHN: You didn't, Peter. Rabbi did not "fall asleep." He was mangled, Peter. He was struck and pierced and bled and beat. I've hardly slept since then. When I close my eyes, I see him. I can't get it out of my head.

PETER: He isn't dead. He can't be. It isn't possible.

JOHN: We were on the mountain with him, Peter. We saw how it was going to end up.

MARY: (looking at them) What are you talking about?

PETER: (to John) He wanted us to keep it a secret.

JOHN: It doesn't matter now. (to Mary) We saw Rabbi with Elijah and Moses.

MARY: What?

PETER: It sounds crazy.

MARY: Yes. Yes, it does.

JOHN: Peter here couldn't even talk. He offered to set tents up for them.

MARY: For...Elijah and Moses?

JOHN: Yep.

PETER: I had to say something!

MARY: Well, that's certainly true.

JOHN: It was bright, and Rabbi shone like the sun, and Moses and Elijah looked to him, and we heard God speak.

PETER: We saw it, Mary. With our own eyes. Not a vision. Not a dream. Something real. Something more than real.

JOHN: And then it was gone.

MARY: And he told you not to tell anyone?

JOHN: Yes.

MARY: Why?

JOHN: I don't know.

PETER: Don't you see? He can't be dead. Moses and Elijah were waiting for him, God spoke, we know that Jesus is the Messiah, that he—

JOHN: And they killed him. We saw him with Moses, who died long ago, and with Elijah, who left this world long ago. He's gone, Peter. Maybe he told us not to tell until after he died

so we would remember how he was on the mountain. We can tell everyone he is with God, that he is glorified. And his teachings will live on.

PETER: I don't want his teachings! I want him!

MARY: Really? Then where were you when he needed you?

PETER: What?

MARY: You said you'd die for him. You're his right-hand man. You couldn't even come to his execution? Where were you?

JOHN: (interceding) We were together but decided it would be best to split up. We didn't know how things would go.

MARY: I wish I hadn't been there. (she slumps tiredly) Now what do we do?

JOHN: We wait.

MARY: For what? (no one answers) For how long?

PETER: Until he comes.

MARY: (screaming) He isn't coming!

Peter is shocked by the words, then stomps off. Mary deflates further.

MARY: John?

JOHN: Yeah?

MARY: I don't know anymore.

JOHN: About what?

MARY: Anything. (pause) He was everything, John. He loved us.

JOHN: He did.

MARY: He's gone.

JOHN: He is.

MARY: Tell me something happy.

JOHN: You're not as miserable as Peter.

MARY: He's convinced Rabbi isn't dead. How is that worse? At least it's hope.

JOHN: He *needs* Rabbi to be alive. There is something Peter needs to tell him. And the dead don't hear.

He exits. Mary, sorrowful, stares at the audience, then stands and exits as lights go down.

ACT II

NARRATOR: One night a feast was held in the palace, and there came a man and prostrated himself before the prince, and all the feasters looked upon him; and they saw that one of his eyes was out and that the empty socket bled. And the prince inquired of him, "What has befallen you?" And the man replied, "O prince, I am by profession a thief, and this night, because there was no moon, I went to rob the money-changer's shop, and as I climbed in through the window I made a mistake and entered the weaver's shop, and in the dark I ran into the weaver's loom and my eye was plucked out. And now, O prince, I ask for justice upon the weaver."

Then the prince sent for the weaver and he came, and it was decreed that one of his eyes should be plucked out.

"O prince," said the weaver, "the decree is just. It is right that one of my eyes be taken. And yet, alas! both are necessary to me in order that I may see the two sides of the cloth that I weave. But I have a neighbour, a cobbler, who has also two eyes, and in his trade both eyes are not necessary."

Then the prince sent for the cobbler. And he came. And they took out one of the cobbler's two eyes.

And justice was satisfied.

"War" by Kahl Il Gibran

Simon lounges in a chair, solemnly examining his knife. A knock comes, a code. Simon glances up briefly.

SIMON: It's open.

Nicodemus hurries in.

NICODEMUS: You haven't locked the door?

SIMON: Apparently not.

NICODEMUS: Aren't you afraid they'll come?

SIMON: (Stares hard at Nicodemus) Really?

NICODEMUS: The Sanhedrin might be appeased, but the city is in turmoil. One wrong move and the Romans will hunt us all down.

SIMON: Let them.

NICODEMUS: Simon, there will be no mercy.

SIMON: (standing) There is never mercy, only judgment. If they come, they shall bleed. Why are you here, Nicodemus? Afraid your religious friends will rat you out?

NICODEMUS: I was looking for others like us.

SIMON: Those who believed.

NICODEMUS: Yes.

SIMON: I believed in something before Rabbi. (He holds up the dagger.) You're the scholar. How many times did our people drive out invaders and occupiers?

NICODEMUS: Too many.

SIMON: But there's always another. Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome. This is our land, the land the Lord gave us. And they killed his prophet!

NICODEMUS: I tried to stop them.

SIMON: Did you? (mocking) Oh, no, please, stop. (done) You traitors lied to condemn him and marched him off to Pilate. It was a bald power play, a desperate, craven act of self-preservation.

NICODEMUS: There are others in the Council who believe, but Ananias and Caiaphas—

SIMON: (stabs toward Nicodemus) That's what this is for.

NICODEMUS: There has been enough bloodshed in Israel.

SIMON: Not Roman blood. They won't allow a Roman citizen to be crucified, but they'll force every petty thief and Jewish troublemaker to carry the cross. Eye for eye, life for life. Let's see a hill crowned with a legion of their own crying out for mercy.

NICODEMUS: That isn't what he taught.

SIMON: Maybe I wasn't listening.

NICODEMUS: We were never friends, Simon, but we both believed.

SIMON: The meek will inherit the earth? With the worms, maybe.

NICODEMUS: Love your enemies. He said that. He *did* that.

SIMON: A sharp blade is a beautiful thing. It separates one thing from another. The flesh from bone. The head from the shoulders. (meaningfully) Truth from deceit. (beat) His words cut me, Nicodemus. Every time.

NICODEMUS: That's why they hated him.

SIMON: That's why I loved him! (beat) Can you understand why we fight, Nicodemus? Do you understand why we resist, even shedding blood? Or are you too holy for that? Too educated and cowardly and nuanced? Can your blood boil, or does it just sit frozen in your veins?

NICODEMUS: I want change, too, Simon.

SIMON: Change? I want revolution! Godless men grow rich and fat on the backs of the faithful. God's people, his own people, are beat and flogged and extorted. The world is upside

down, Nicodemus. That is what revolution is for, to throw down the arrogant and raise up the lowly. Doesn't that sound like God? Isn't that what Jesus proclaimed?

NICODEMUS: He told us to carry crosses, not swords.

SIMON: (looks at dagger) It doesn't work. He carried his cross. They still have their swords.

NICODEMUS: His spirit, his teachings, will live on.

SIMON: They come to death. If we continue to teach as he did, we will die like he did. I don't mind death. I was ready to die for the cause years ago. But there is no hope. What power do his teachings hold? None—only to make us weak and ready to offer ourselves up for slaughter.

NICODEMUS: I came to him, early on, at night.

SIMON: (bitter laugh) Of course you came at night.

NICODEMUS: He told me I must be born again.

SIMON: What does that mean?

NICODEMUS: I don't know. Not fully. But perhaps he will be born again in our words. Maybe he knew that.

SIMON: He did.

NICODEMUS: How can you be certain?

SIMON: He pointed himself straight for Jerusalem. He spoke of dying. He spoke with the conviction of a soldier ready to do his part. But it doesn't make sense. If he had resisted, if he had used his trial to decry Rome or the corruption of the priests, if he had hung from his cross and cursed our enemies—that would have been triumph. But he didn't. Instead, he looked at them and, this is what I heard, he forgave them.

Simon turns away.

NICODEMUS: That is what he said, I'm told.

SIMON: You cold-blooded Pharisee! Why haven't you ripped your robes and covered your head in ash? I'm too filthy for such acts of piety, but you're supposed to be the righteous of Israel. That night, after he died, I strode through the streets, half-mad, begging God to bring down fire. I wanted to burn everything, to see everything broken and burnt because of what they did to him. He was beautiful, Nicodemus. How does anyone who has done nothing but good, who healed and forgave and welcomed, how does he suffer lies and plots and torture and still say—I forgive? Those who kill such a man deserve death, and I begged for it. God did not answer me. (beat) Will he ever?

NICODEMUS: He will.

SIMON: Empty words.

NICODEMUS: (sadly) It does seem that way.

SIMON: How do you live in such a world, without vengeance in your heart?

NICODEMUS: Cowardice. You are not wrong. And my world is small. I believe in heaven as an idea, somewhere else, not a place here, not a revolution. Just the end to some small worries, the start of some pleasant hobby. When Jesus spoke, it was like I had spent my life in a dark room and he opened the door and outside was an endless horizon of light and color. Religion was no longer just words on a scroll but a window into a world that sang. The door shut when they killed him. It's been dark ever since. It's all contracted again.

SIMON: Are we destined to be the same people again, before we met him?

NICODEMUS: It's how we were born—and we can't be born again.

SIMON: (bitter laugh) I'll find out where the other disciples are gathering for you.

NICODEMUS: I'd like to see them.

SIMON: We can talk about him.

NICODEMUS: I hope so. I'm afraid we'll just let everything go, now that he's gone.

SIMON: We will.

NICODEMUS: Always the pessimist.

SIMON: Realist. Revolutions always fail when the leader dies, the one who has the vision, who sees the world not as it is, but as it should be. Some people, a very few, can sustain the vision. But without them, reality crushes everything.

NICODEMUS: And the world remains unchanged.

Simon nods.

NICODEMUS: At least I saw the world through his eyes, at least for awhile.

SIMON: It was beautiful.

NICODEMUS: It was.

END ACT II

ACT III

NARRATOR: They are now the objects of that very same anger and wrath of God, that is expressed in the torments of hell. And the reason why they do not go down to hell at each moment, is not because God, in whose power they are, is not then very angry with them; as he is with many miserable creatures now tormented in hell, who there feel and bear the fierceness of his wrath. Yea, God is a great deal more angry with great numbers that are now on earth: yea, doubtless, with many that are now in this congregation, who it may be are at ease, than he is with many of those who are now in the flames of hell.

So that it is not because God is unmindful of their wickedness, and does not resent it, that he does not let loose his hand and cut them off. God is not altogether such an one as themselves, though they may imagine him to be so. The wrath of God burns against them, their damnation does not slumber; the pit is prepared, the fire is made ready, the furnace is now hot, ready to receive them; the flames do now rage and glow. The glittering sword is whet, and held over them, and the pit hath opened its mouth under them.

from "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" by Jonathan Edwards

Peter enters, searching. He finds a spot, looks up, then studies the ground. He kneels down to hesitantly touch one particular spot. Meanwhile, Mary comes in.

MARY: What is it?

Peter, startled, jumps to his feet.

PETER: What are you doing here?

MARY: I followed you. (Looking up) There's a bit of rope hanging from that branch.

PETER: I saw it.

MARY: What does it mean?

PETER: The rope was cut.

MARY: What was on it?

PETER: Judas.

MARY: (shocked) Dead?

PETER: They say he tried to give back the money they paid him.

MARY: He sent an innocent man to death. I'm having trouble feeling pity for him.

PETER: He was one of us.

MARY: He betrayed us.

PETER: We all betrayed him. We're all alive still. They didn't crucify us. We were silent.

MARY: There was nothing we could have done.

PETER: Judas did something. He tried to give the money back. Do only wicked actions matter? Can we do nothing good at all?

MARY: Why are you here, Peter?

PETER: I wanted to come here and see it for myself.

MARY: Why? Hasn't there been enough sorrow.

PETER: I wanted to imagine...

MARY: Peter, I don't know what's going on. Why are you talking like this.

PETER: (painful admission) I've done something terrible.

MARY: What? What have you done?

PETER: I didn't mean to. That night—the soldiers were everywhere, and they dragged him into Caiaphas' court. I'd—I'd cut off a man's ear, in the heat of the moment, but Rabbi healed him, told me to put my sword away. It was dark and I wondered at everything he had told us that night, and everyone was talking and angry. I doubted, Mary, and I wanted to hide, to bide my time. That's what I told myself. And they said I was a Galilean, that I was his disciple. Faced with soldiers, at his side, I fought, but with him arrested, with strange men and women around me, not armed, just curious, some hostile, their thoughts turning—I told them I didn't know him. That I had never known him. Three times I said it. Three times! Who was Jesus to me? No one! No one. (beat) A rooster crowed. It woke me. He was being led through the courtyard and he looked at me. Has he looked at you like that, Mary? Eyes that see everything. Eyes filled with hurt. (beat) Judas is dead. He betrayed Rabbi could not bear the guilt. How am I to bear mine?

MARY: You aren't Judas, Peter.

PETER: No—I didn't get money for what I did. I did it for free.

MARY: Stop talking like that!

PETER: What separates me from Judas? Given the right circumstances, we both betrayed him.

MARY: (eventually) Surely, he understood your heart, that you didn't mean it, not really.

PETER: Of course he understood. He told me I'd do it!

MARY: I mean, he'd forgive you if he could.

PETER: But he can't. He's dead.

MARY: Peter, you know the life I led when Rabbi found me. No man would associate with me, not in daylight, not if he pretended goodness. But Rabbi didn't pretend. He was good, the only good man I've known. He welcomed me, taught me. Forgave me.

PETER: But he lived, Mary. I betrayed him and I'll never see him again. Where do I fall on my knees? At his grave?

MARY: You said he knew you were going to do it. Surely he knew how you would feel afterward.

PETER: Feel? What if he did know? He'd know my hidden cowardice, how I lied, in my heart, when I promised to die for him. He knew dark, twisted parts of me even I refused to look at. Is this guilt I feel repentance or is it just sorrow, just self-loathing? Am I sorry I did it or sorry he saw me do it—or sorry that his last view of me was as a wretch, a worm, a pitiless coward?

MARY: He loved you, Peter.

PETER: And I killed him!

Mary is silent for a time.

MARY: I followed Rabbi as he carried his cross. Once, he stumbled, and he turned to us women. It was terrible to look at him, struggling beneath that weight. I thought it would crush him. I don't know how he bore it. But he looked at us, and he said, "Don't weep for me. Weep for yourselves and for your children. If men do these things now, when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?"

PETER: What does it mean?

MARY: I don't know. Half of what he said I didn't understand, not right away, but I knew it was true. But I wonder—he accepted me, Peter. He accepted Matthew and Simon, tax collector and zealot. Women followed him, blind and lame and leper ran after him. And he accepted them. What now? They beat and tortured him, and he was loved by the people. He was a teacher and a prophet. What happens to us now? We were never loved.

PETER: We'll take care of you, Mary. Nothing will happen.

MARY: Thank you, Peter. (beat) But we're just comforting each other with words, you know.

PETER: I know. Words can't change who we are.

MARY: Outcasts.

PETER: Murderers.

MARY: Was life this dark before we met him?

PETER: No. We didn't know it was dark before him. We didn't know what it tasted like, to be accepted.

MARY: Not just accepted. Shown our flaws and made better.

PETER: Only our sins are left, like sores that never heal.

MARY: Pray to God, Peter. Ask him to forgive you.

PETER: I can't. Jesus held the way to eternal life. He held everything, and I threw it away, I sold it for a moment's safety. Who will give me eternal life when I despise it so?

MARY: Pray, Peter.

PETER: I can't. I tried. There are no words.

MARY: Then pray for me. I know enough Scripture to know the adulteress woman is not under God's blessing. Wrath is what I was destined for.

PETER: We're all destined for wrath, Mary, now that he's dead. He came from God and we killed him. Our whole history's one hard-hearted rebellion after another. It's all we can do. John told me his last words. "It is finished." We're done, Mary. There are no more second chances. Jesus is dead. We have to figure out how to live with that black absence the best we can.

MARY: Peter!

PETER: That's all I can see. I understand, I think, what Judas must have seen. A pit, opening up, waiting for him. Waiting. (beat) Don't tell anyone what I did. They'll find out eventually, but I can't bear them knowing. I need the rest of us to stick together, at least for awhile. I don't want to be alone.

MARY: Neither do I.

A moment of silence.

MARY: Let's go, Peter. We're gathering tonight, remember? Come with me now. I don't want to stay here.

PETER: Do you think he's better off?

MARY: Judas?

PETER: (looking up) I don't think I could do it.

MARY: Come on, Peter. We've got to look forward.

PETER: Yes, you're right. No use dwelling on it. It'll wait for me. Let's go.

END ACT III

ACT IV

NARRATOR: Life is blood, shed and offered.
The eagle's eye can face this dree.
To beasts of chase the lie is proffered:
Timor Mortis Conturbat Me.

The beast of foot sings Holdfast only,
For flesh is bruckle and foot is slee.
Strength to the strong and the lordly and lonely.
Timor Mortis Exultat Me.

Shame to the slothful and woe to the weak one,
Death to the dreadful who turn to flee.
Blood to the tearing, the talon'd, the beaked one.
Timor Mortis are We.

-From *The Sword in the Stone* by T.H. White

Two soldiers enter, doing their rounds.

BRUTUS: You hear about the crucifixion?

TITUS: Which crucifixion? There's lot o' crucifixions. Like asking me, you hear about that bloke being born? We all been born, and we's all dying, and seems we crucify enough of these Jews to make a man downright bored with the whole thing.

BRUTUS: The one they called a king. Hear 'bout that one?

TITUS: King? Ain't no king but Caesar.

BRUTUS: Musta been least one other. Jesus, they called him. Nailed him up with a sign sayin' he was king and everything.

TITUS: What fer?

BRUTUS: To prove he's king, I guess.

TITUS: No, what they kill him fer?

BRUTUS: Can't have no extra kings walking about now, can we?

TITUS: Well, what was he king of?

BRUTUS: Sign said he were king of the Jews, that's what I heard.

TITUS: They ain't got no king. That's what we're here making sure of.

BRUTUS: Exactly. That's it. I heard some other stuff too. This Jesus, some were saying he's some sort of holy man. Heard him talking 'bout the kingdom of God.

TITUS: Huh. How's that goin' for him?

BRUTUS: He's dead, ain't he? Still, it's enough to make my blood boil, it is, just thinkin' of it.

TITUS: Thinkin' of what?

BRUTUS: Why, him claiming he's a king and his kingdom's God's. That's a direct affront.

TITUS: To Caesar?

BRUTUS: To us. We're soldiers. 'Tis our duty to keep peace and law and all that. We're part of something big, something encompasses the whole world. Where we go, comes peace. Pax Romana, you know.

TITUS: Yes, yes. I've attended the meetings.

BRUTUS: Where's this so-called king get off, tell me that? We've built roads. We've aqueducts. We've got legions and outposts. This world is ours.

TITUS: So it is, so it is. A grand world it is, too.

BRUTUS: A man's world. A man's empire. Ordered. Structured.

TITUS: Hence the crucifixions.

BRUTUS: Exactly! Hence the crucifixions. A swift fist to punish. That's Pax Romana.

TITUS: This king—what happened to his army?

BRUTUS: Just a bunch of peasants that ran off at the first sign of trouble. Even their own people didn't like him. He said, King, but what he meant was, Cult Leader.

TITUS: Good riddance.

BRUTUS: Here, here!

TITUS: (considering) Kingdom of heaven. What does that even mean?

BRUTUS: Religious doublespeak, probably, for "all in your head." You know what makes Rome, what made all the lesser kingdoms before us? Power. Line up, bow down, pull your weight, make your way. That's the kingdom of earth, and all that matters.

TITUS: But, why bother with this king, if his kingdom's just in his head?

BRUTUS: My bet, started coming out of his head. Started trying to change how things are. That's when religion goes wrong. So we get some boards, we knock 'em together, and we nail the chap to them. End of problem.

TITUS: Someone's head always ends up on the pike.

BRUTUS: Wrong execution, but true nonetheless.

TITUS: Suppose ours will be there someday? You know, disconnected from our bodies and staring down? Or nailed to some wood, even?

BRUTUS: It's a possibility. History is the shedding of blood.

TITUS: It *is* the way of the world.

BRUTUS: Luckily, the one with the hammer and the nail rules.

TITUS: And crucifies so-called kings, am I right?

BRUTUS: You are. You are indeed.

END ACT IV

ACT V

NARRATOR: The madman sprang into their midst and pierced them with his glances.

"Where has God gone?" he cried. "I shall tell you. We have killed him - you and I. We are his murderers. But how have we done this? How were we able to drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What did we do when we unchained the earth from its sun? Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving now? Away from all suns? Are we not perpetually falling? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there any up or down left? Are we not straying as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space? Has it not become colder? Is it not more and more night coming on all the time? Must not lanterns be lit in the morning? Do we not hear anything yet of the noise of the gravediggers who are burying God? Do we not smell anything yet of God's decomposition? Gods too decompose. God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. How shall we, murderers of all murderers, console ourselves?"

From "The Parable of the Madman" by Friedrich Nietzsche

A table. One by one, slowly, the disciples enter—John, Simon, Mary, Nicodemus, and finally Peter, who sits at the head of the table. Bread is already on the table. Peter takes it, looks at the others.

PETER: Lord Almighty, we thank you for this meal. (He breaks the bread—and is taken by memory—he looks at the others) What if this were our last supper?

NICODEMUS: Our days on earth are like grass; like wildflowers, we bloom and die.

JOHN: Peter, let's just eat.

PETER: I can't. Even when I take this bread...I chew it, consume it, and it's gone. Was that all he was?

MARY: No. He was more.

SIMON: He's a symbol, a martyr. He told us, remember me when you eat. Let's remember him.

PETER: But why? What's the point?

JOHN: That we would remember what he taught us. To love one another.

Silence.

PETER: Is that all?

JOHN: It's no small thing to love one another.

PETER: No—but wasn't there more? Did the last three years come down to that?

MARY: Peter, he showed us how to love the poor, to accept the outcast. He brought me in, and you, and Simon, and John, and Nicodemus. Pharisees and Zealots, women and fishermen. That's new. That's amazing.

SIMON: The Romans hold us down. Jesus lifted us up. He taught us that the people, not governments, hold the power.

PETER: But that's *not* what he taught. That's not why we followed him—not why I followed him.

NICODEMUS: Moses was a great teacher and prophet, whom the Lord spoke with face to face. He brought God's laws to us, taught us how to live. He first told us to love our neighbors. Though he died, his words continue to this day. Jesus was a second Moses.

PETER: I know Moses, Nicodemus. And I *saw* Moses. Rabbi was more than Moses.

JOHN: Peter, it doesn't make sense, but Rabbi is gone. We have to continue in his teachings. We must love one another.

NICODEMUS: We will reform our religion, bring it back to the righteousness Jesus proclaimed.

SIMON: We will overturn governments and tyrannies. They hated him. They will learn to hate us.

PETER: You're all wrong. You don't get it. (desperate) Mary, you understand, don't you? This can't be all.

MARY: (sorrowful) Why not, Peter? Dreams are one thing. They can't bear reality.

PETER: Eternal life! He promised us eternal life!

NICODEMUS: Hold to the law, and God will reward you. Jesus showed us how to please God.

PETER: Please God! (despairing) How are we supposed to please God? We let his Messiah get nailed to a cross.

MARY: It's not your fault, Peter.

PETER: Yes it is! It's all of our faults. We are Jews and we kill the prophets and celebrate the death of holy men. The religious leaders killed him, you say! Well, we have one of them with us. It was the Romans, those filthy occupiers! Tell me, Simon, I didn't see a Zealot uprising to stop them. It was Judas' fault then! John and I saw Judas leave that night. We had no idea what he would do. How could we have no idea? And don't tell me his associating with people like you, Mary, didn't put a target on his back. He was a godly man, a blameless man, but it was guilt by association—association with us.

NICODEMUS: You are being unfair, Peter.

JOHN: There is nothing fair in these events.

SIMON: He was always going to die. That is what the system of the world demands. He understood that.

PETER: And what if he was God? (stunned silence) We don't want to talk about that, do we?

MARY: It can't have been true. You don't kill God.

JOHN: At his trial, he did not deny it.

PETER: That's why we followed him. Not just because of what he taught. We couldn't put it into words at first, but we knew, we *know* that he spoke words that weren't just true, they were—

JOHN: The word of God.

SIMON: When he spoke of his kingdom, I longed for it. If David had appeared in his glory, I would not have felt as much a subject to him as I did to Jesus.

NICODEMUS: I can't—God is one, and there is no other. (searching) But...the angel of the Lord appeared to Abraham and to Moses, to others, and I wondered if God spoke again face to face.

MARY: He spoke to me and he taught me. Whether he was God or angel, I cannot explain, but he was my Teacher and Master.

JOHN: But what can it mean? I thought, or I hoped, that God had finally come to save his people, that the fulfillment of the promises of the prophets had come. But Rabbi knew he would be rejected. He told us so. How can it be? Can we really have killed him?

NICODEMUS: He told us things we did not understand, things he said we should understand.

SIMON: We have been rebels since the beginning—Adam, the people of Noah's day, those he led out of Egypt, lines of kings who did not follow the Law. I'm no better. I would cut Caesar's throat if I had the chance. We had Jesus among us—and we drew his blood.

PETER: You understand, then. He did not just die. We died. What hope have we now? My soul is black with sin. How shall I gain forgiveness from the one I killed?

NICODEMUS: This is madness. He cannot be God.

PETER: He said he was. Do you deny it?

NICODEMUS: No.

PETER: We lost *him*. How do we move past that?

JOHN: We should tell others of him. What he said, what he did.

MARY: It's not the same. It's just memories, just stories now. It's not him.

JOHN: But we could that at least. We're his disciples. We learned from him so we could teach others what he taught us.

SIMON: It would ensure *they* don't win. They can't kill him if we keep him alive.

JOHN: Peter?

PETER: It's not enough. He isn't alive no matter how much we talk about him.

JOHN: It's all we can do.

NICODEMUS: He wanted to change things. We can finish what he started.

Knock. Everyone goes silent.

MARY: (quietly to others) Who is it?

PETER: (quietly) I don't know.

Knock.

BRUTUS: Anyone in there?

SIMON: Roman soldiers!

NICODEMUS: They've found us.

BRUTUS: Hello? Hey, anyone there?

TITUS: This is the place, ain't it, where they said those disciples went?

BRUTUS: That's what the Cap'n said. (Knock) Hey, open up. We won't hurt you. Just want to rough you up a bit to make sure you won't cause any trouble.

TITUS: Yeah! We want to be done with this Messiah stuff.

BRUTUS: A bit of religion, that's fine. We got an arrangement with you Jews.

TITUS: But none of that palm-waving, table-flipping stuff no more. We ain't puttin' up with that.

BRUTUS: Well, just a little, maybe.

TITUS: What? Seriously, a little?

BRUTUS: Sure. People's got to blow off steam now and then.

TITUS: How are they supposed to know when nuff is enuf?

BRUTUS: When we draw swords. Or someone dies. Good warnings, either way.

TITUS: Hear that! We've got swords and we're not afraid to use them. (to Brutus) That good?

BRITUS: That's mint. (to disciples) Have a good evening.

TITUS: 'Night!

The disciples look at one another.

JOHN: It won't last.

SIMON: We'll be crushed.

PETER: You still don't understand. There's nothing to crush. Just stories of a man who said, be good. No one will fear that. We can tell the stories. People will admire him. But it's all meaningless.

MARY: If he isn't who he claimed to be.

PETER: If he isn't who we thought he was.

NICODEMUS: And what if he was?

PETER: If he were here, if he were alive....

JOHN: He would make all things new.

SIMON: Make all things just.

NICODEMUS: We would be born again.

MARY: And we would be clean.

PETER: If—but he isn't here. He's in the grave. And when we wake tomorrow, he'll still be in the grave.

Silence.

MARY: But, Peter...what if he wasn't...?

Dim lights.