



Is This the End?

*a brief one-act of the cross
for Good Friday*

COMMISSIONED BY
MARTENSDALE COMMUNITY CHURCH

Final Version

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PRODUCTION NOTES

Is This the End? is available in two versions: musical and non-musical play. This script is the non-musical version.

Length: Dramatic script without music is approximately 20 minutes.

Even without music, blackouts could—and possibly *should*—be used between scenes to express the passage of time, and allow for changes of mood in the characters from one scene to the next. If blackouts are used, program music could also be added; otherwise limit the blackouts to just 5 or 6 seconds.

So blackout directions have been left in the script, but if the director decides not to use them, just let the characters pause in thought for a few seconds between scenes.

Because the lighting directions in this script suggest the passage of time from pre-dawn to early morning (moon only, to moon with early sunlight, to sunlight only), if blackouts are not employed, the director should consider increasing level of stage lighting as one scene transitions to the next.

CHARACTERS

The apostles and brothers, James and John.

James, the older of the two, is played more energetic, even erratic, while John, though younger, is more stable and cerebral.

COSTUMES & MAKEUP

There are several factors that will influence the look of the two characters. The local director will decide which factors will take precedence.

- James and John, though fisherman by trade, come from a well-off family. Their father (Zebedee) was sufficiently wealthy to employ servants and support (perhaps financially) Jesus' ministry.
- They have been on the road with Jesus for the last few years and, mostly living outside.
- They have just been running to escape the guards/soldiers looking to round up the followers of the just-crucified rabbi.

For the inaugural production of *Is This the End?* we gave them clothing that had been originally fine, but was now dirty and tattered from their time on the road.

Remember that at this time James (the elder of the two) and John were relatively young. Casting and makeup should reflect the fact that they were active, young men.

PROPS AND SET

The set, if any, is left to the discretion of the local director. For the inaugural production we simply suggested a garden setting with various plants, and built a fabric-covered "rock" out of old chairs and wood, which was of sufficient size and strength for the two characters to sit upon.

SCENE ONE

The Time: Late Friday night, after the burial of Jesus

The Place: Garden of Gethsemane

House lights down.

(The first two lines are delivered offstage.)

James

(breathless, from running)

Don't turn around! The torches will light your face.

John

(breathless, from running)

Aw, they're too far back—and we're almost there. They headed up toward the city. We're all right.

Stage lights up low (blue gel [for the moon]) on James and John as they enter.

James

I don't know why you wanted to come back here anyway. Too dangerous. This is the first place they'll look for us!

John

(reassuring)

We'll hear if they come—we'll see them. Besides—

(painfully)

—they have their hands full right now.

James

(looking back to where they came)

Could you tell how many there were?

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John

(energetically)

Does it matter? How many do you think it would take? Two? Three?
Do you have a weapon? I don't.

James

(returning)

What about Mary?

John

She's with Mother and the other women. I thought it safer for them
right now if I weren't along.

(as much reassuring himself)

She'll be all right. The soldiers will leave them alone.

James

(agitated; pacing)

I heard we are to meet up later—to sort things out.

John

(distantly)

Yes... sort things out.

James

(more distantly)

Yes.

***It is an awkward moment; neither knows how to broach the
painful subject that's been on their minds since the arrest. But
James finally breaks the silence.***

1 **James**

2 Is this the end? Is this the end of it?

3

4 **John**

5 *(with a sigh)*

6 I don't know, James. I really don't.

7 *(pause, looking around)*

8 How this place is now changed. So many memories—and now that's all
9 there is. Just memories.

10

11 **James**

12 This garden was our home—our refuge.

13

14 **John**

15 *(agreeing)*

16 We were safe here. Here we were family. The Master seemed almost one
17 of us.

18

19 **James**

20 *(abruptly)*

21 So what happened? This isn't how we began. This isn't how it was to
22 end.

23 *(beat)*

24 Now what? What are we to do? Do we all just go back home, back to
25 work, as if none of this happened? Do we just go back to our nets?

26

27 **John**

28 I don't think so.

29

30 **James**

31 You were the closest to Him, John—did He know this was coming?

32

33 **John**

34 Of course He did—He spoke of it a number of times.

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James

(frustrated)

But how were we—how was I to know when He wasn't speaking in riddles! I'm just a fisherman—how can I remember all He said? How am I to understand such things?

John

None of us understood at the time—still don't. But He did tell us He would be betrayed, and that this would—

James

(interrupting; furious)

He was betrayed, all right. Right here, in this very refuge, He was betrayed by that snake Judas. He should rot in hell for what he did! How could Jesus have been so blind as to include him in our family?

(beat)

The treachery! The deceit.

John

Was it? Or did Jesus know that, too?

(pause)

We had a habit of underestimating Him. It was too easy to think of Him as just one of us. But He wasn't. For all his faults, Peter saw it. Our Master was "the Christ, the Son of the living God."

(pause)

Would the Son of God be fooled by a traitor? He knew it at the supper. He knew it at the end. Surely He knew it when He called Judas.

James

(after some thought)

I'm beginning to think I didn't even know Jesus. It all happened so fast. Did we really know Him? Did we have any idea what it was like for Him?

(pause)

1 What was it like for Him to live with all of us, knowing who we were
2 in our hearts? What was it like for Him to approach the end, knowing
3 what would happen?

4 *(overwhelmed)*

5 What a horrible way to live! What He must have gone through!

6
7 **John**

8 *(soberly; bitterly)*

9 And He went through it alone.

10
11 **James**

12 When Jesus needed us the most, we were asleep!

13 *(pause; recalling)*

14 Each time He woke us we had lost more of Him. By the last time, I
15 barely recognized Him. The sorrow. The horrible pain He was suffering
16 written across His face.

17
18 **John**

19 And that face will haunt my dreams.

20
21 **James**

22 *(disgusted)*

23 And we were asleep!

24
25 **John**

26 *(somberly, wearily)*

27 We were asleep.

28
29 **Lights fade to black (opt.)**

SCENE TWO

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2
3 *Stage lights up medium (blue gel and low white) on James and John.*

4
5 **John**

6 *(noticing his brother staring into space)*

7 You're off somewhere else.

8
9 **James**

10 Hmm? I was thinking of the day Jesus called us. We were with Father,
11 mending nets, remember? Here was our cousin, standing on shore.
12 There was nothing special about Him—He was still just Aunt Mary's
13 son. But He had Simon and Andrew with Him—which I thought very
14 odd. They were just standing there, on either side of Him, and they
15 had the strangest look in their eyes.

16 *(pause)*

17 Then Jesus spoke. Do you remember what He said? "Come with Me,"
18 He said, "and I will make you into fishers of men." Well, that was very
19 odd, too.

20
21 **John**

22 *(chuckling quietly)*

23 When He said that, I immediately thought of our fishing nets bursting
24 with men!

25
26 **James**

27 But when He said those words—I can't explain it any better—it was no
28 longer our cousin there. That voice, the way He spoke,... I don't know,
29 He was different. He looked the same, but somehow He was changed—
30 as if the person inside was not the same.

31
32 **John**

33 *(actively agreeing)*

34 Yes, I felt that, too.

35 *(pause)*

1 Over the years I had said no to our cousin so many times... But at the
2 sound of His words that day, I lost all resistance.

3
4 **James**

5 *(quickly agreeing)*

6 Yes, yes! Exactly. And another odd thing that day:

7 *(beat)*

8 When we did what Jesus asked, and stepped ashore, I expected Father
9 to haul us back into that boat, but he didn't say a word.

10
11 **John**

12 That's because he and Mother already knew about the change that
13 had come over Jesus. I heard them talking about it. Jesus was away for
14 a time—no one knew where He was. But when He returned, He was
15 different. After John baptized Him, He disappeared—must have been
16 more than a month—and He came back changed.

17 *(beat)*

18 There was an urgency about Him.

19
20 **James**

21 *(referring to their father, Zebedee)*

22 So that wily old fisherman knew all along.

23
24 **John**

25 If he hadn't, he would have hauled us back into that boat. Not many
26 things get past Zebedee.

27
28 ***They sit in silence for a moment.***

1 **James**

2 I want to go talk with him.

3
4 **John**

5 With who?

6
7 **James**

8 I guess for the last three years we've been so occupied with our Master,
9 I haven't thought much about Father. But of course, both our parents
10 have been supportive of all this.

11 *(pause)*

12 And now I want to talk with him. He's hurting too—I know it.

13
14 **John**

15 And he's probably as confused as we are. No matter what Jesus said,
16 none of us saw this coming. And none of us know what will come next.

17
18 **James**

19 *(after another moment of thought)*

20 When we were younger, when I was growing up, God was just God to
21 me. Something to sacrifice to, to be afraid of. But Jesus always referred
22 to God as "Father"—His Father and ours—our "Father in heaven."

23
24 **John**

25 And that's what got Him into trouble.

26
27 **James**

28 I know. But it worked on me. It personalized this One who has
29 demanded the blood of our sacrifices.

30 *(pause)*

31 But I was thinking... Jesus has just been killed—buried.

32 *(pause)*

33 What must His Father think of that.

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John

Turn it around. How would Zebedee feel if either of us had been the one hanging on a tree?

James

Do you think God is really that kind of Father?

John

I think Jesus meant every word He said.

(pause)

One of the last things He said before He died was to ask His Father to forgive those who had just crucified Him.

James

(incredulous)

You're not serious.

John

He did. And I believe His Father will forgive them.

(pause)

Jesus would not have called God "Father"—and He wouldn't have taught us to pray to our "Father in heaven"—unless God was that kind of Father.

(pause)

All of heaven must have wept to see the Son nailed to that tree.

Lights fade to black (opt.)

SCENE THREE

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3 *Stage lights up medium (low blue gel and med. white) on James*
4 *and John.*

5
6 **John**

7 Do you think it had to happen?

8
9 **James**

10 What.

11
12 **John**

13 Do you think Jesus had to die?

14
15 **James**

16 *(after a moment of thought; matter-of-factly)*

17 It was inevitable. The priests, the Sanhedrin—all of the rulers—were
18 determined to get Him. It was just a matter of time.

19
20 **John**

21 I know the rulers were against Him. That's not the point.

22 *(beat; as much to himself as James)*

23 Was it necessary? Was He supposed to die?

24
25 **James**

26 *(confused)*

27 What do we accomplish in death?

28 *(becoming more animated)*

29 What can Jesus do on earth if He is not here? Whatever happens to us
30 when we die, our work on earth is done.

31
32 **John**

33 *(also more animated)*

34 So after three years, that's it?! That's all there is? Whatever He
35 accomplished in that time—that's it?

1 **James shrugs his shoulders, as if to say, "Well, yeah."**

2

3 **John**

4 *(agitated)*

5 I can't accept that. I won't accept that. The very Son of God comes
6 down to be with us for a few years—then He just dies?

7 *(beat)*

8 There has to be more.

9

10 **James**

11 What more could there be?

12

13 **John**

14 He told us He would suffer—that He had to suffer. I just didn't realize
15 it meant death—such a horrible death.

16

17 **James**

18 What are you saying?

19

20 **John**

21 I don't pretend to understand it, but there had to be purpose behind
22 what happened. There had to be a reason.

23

24 **James**

25 The Master told us He came to save sinners. But how can He do that
26 when He's dead?

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28 **John ponders this, his thoughts taking him back to the cross.**

29

30 **John**

31 Aunt Mary was leaning against me for support. She could barely stand.
32 The sight before us was... hideous. Her son, hanging there—it would
33 have been easier if He were dead. But He wasn't. After the abuse He

34

35

1 suffered, I don't know why He was still alive.

2 (pause)

3 Day had turned to night—it was a waking nightmare. At one point
4 Jesus cried out. It seemed He was nearing the end, so I left the women
5 and moved closer. The last thing I heard Him say was, "It is finished."

6 (turning to James)

7 "It is finished," James. Whatever Jesus came to do—He did it. We may
8 not know what it was; perhaps some day we will. But it was something.

9 (beat)

10 The cross finished something important—which means it was part of it.

11
12 **James**

13 (soberly)

14 Then it's not the end.

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16 **John**

17 It's not the end.

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19 **Lights fade to black (opt.)**
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SCENE FOUR

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3 *Stage lights slowly up to full.*
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5 **James**

6 I can't shake the feeling that we've let Him down. And now He's gone.
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8 **John**

9 I know. I feel the same. I keep going over our time with Jesus—over
10 and over in my mind. What a sorry lot we were.
11

12 **James**

13 Maybe you're right. Maybe none of this means it is over—that there is
14 still something for us to do. But what? I feel like a young boy who just
15 finished only his first day at synagogue. If we were so ignorant when
16 we were with Jesus, how can we ever be more without Him?
17

18 **John**

19 I'm not sure it's possible to be "more" without Jesus.
20

21 **James**

22 *(insistently)*

23 John, He's gone!
24

25 **John**

26 *(ruminating, but still frustrated)*

27 I don't know.

28 *(slightly brighter)*

29 Maybe not.
30

30 *(pause)*

31 The cross ended His time with us. But maybe it began something new.
32 Maybe the cross was necessary to begin this new... new...
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34 **James**

35 What?

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John

(struggling to put words to this unknown)

Fellowship? Friendship? Ministry? Life?

(beat)

I don't think Jesus would have invested so much of Himself in us if it was all going to end with His death. So I have to believe that there is more, and the cross is part of it—the essential part.

(pause)

Somehow—in ways we can't imagine—the cross is the gateway to what will follow.

James

(soberly)

If you're right, it was a hard price to pay.

John

But wouldn't Jesus be the perfect one to pay it? Wouldn't the Son of God be the only one able to pay that price?

James

Something just ended.

John

(happily)

And something just began.

They exit. Lights fade to black.

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