

The Thief

NOTES: This Document includes:

- (1) A stripped down version at the back, as I know time is critical.
- (2) Portions of this version which are “optional” – so that you can cut as you see fit.

As an example, the story of “Simon” talking to Dismas is not critical to Dismas’ story. I developed the Simon subplot because Jesus uses *people* to spread the good news. Even new believers can share what He has done for them. That’s good – and often overlooked -- theology. So, please keep it in if you can.

Author's Performance Suggestions: Dress in 50s James Dean wantabee outfit: leather jacket, white T-Shirt, cigarette pack in pocket -- playing cards wrapped up in white paper, works fine, sunglasses are a maybe, as is doing a little comb swipe at the beginning. Accent is Jersey or Brooklyn 50s, tough guy.

If they laugh, be prepare to throw in the following at some point (giving the audience permission to laugh): "What? You's laughing at me? You's wants me to come and break your leg or somethin'? Well that's OK, I'm dying up here. . . .”

Why the Humor? I gave the original “straight” performance to a director of our local theater company. She gave me the following critique: “Wow! That’s powerful! But could you put some humor in it?” I raised my eyebrows and said, “Huh? The guy is dying! How can that be funny?” She explained that humor takes the edge off of what can otherwise be emotionally difficult. I took her thought and ran with it. So, Dismas becomes “comic relief” in the overall performance.

An added benefit of the humor is that it makes the whole presentation “fun”. Which means it’s more likely people will invite their friends. It’s not quite as “preachy” as it would be if done straight. But the message is still powerful.

Dennis L. Dunn

The Thief (version 1)

Yas won't find my name in the Gospels.

'Cause I never did 'noth'n for Jesus. Yet, He did everything for me.

See, I'm the thief on the cross.

Name's Johnny. Johnny Dismas.

(Girls trio below – NOTE INCLUDED ON DEMO)

(to the tune of "Johnny Angel")

(Johnny Dismas,

 You're no angel,

You're a rouge and you're a lying thief.

 But you changed on the tree to a point of simple belief . . .

 shanna-na shanna-na)

Catholics say I'm the Patron Saint of Thieves. Not exactly what Ma was hopin' for.
But, ya takes what ya can get.

Ma kept harpin' on me to get a "good" job. Wanted me ta do somethin'
"spectable." Be a used chariot salesman, lawyer [*or: tax collector*] . . . somethin'
like that.

But, "honest" work don't suit me, none. I'm not a nine to five type of guy, more
like 10 to 20.

Sees, I wanted to grab everything. Even as a kid, I grabbed stuff. Grapes. Bronze
coins. Them there little Bronze Wheels Racing Chariots. (*thumbs up*) Got me a
whole collection. . .

Eventually, I gets older, sees. My friends and me, we lived for today. And we
took what we could from tomorrow.

Dad yelled. Ma cried. I wouldn't listen. Not to them. Not to nobody. I got better
things to do.

At 15 I'm on the streets with a bottle and my friends and the fastest fingers this side of Damascus.

We had quite a little group. Legs Lazarus. Harry the Horsetrader. When they nabbed him pitchin' ponies, they horse-whipped him. . . . I guess there was some kinda rough justice in that . . . don't knows for sure.

First time I got busted they give me the whip . . couldn't walk for three days.

Stealings a pain, ya knows?

Decided to go legit. But, heys, honest work don't suit me none. Soon enough it was the whip again.

Now it was about that time I start'd hearin' stories -- 'bout Him, Jesus.

Buddy of mine, Simon, seen 'im. Comes back with wild, miracle stories yas won't believe. Jesus touches lepers – lepers! – and their clean! Touches the blind, they sees. Says a prayer and opens a free delicatessen – without the bagels¹.

Now, let me tells yas, Jesus' got hands a guy like me can respect.

Simon even got baptized. Gave up the booze . . the women . . got a job. Blames it all on Jesus, sees.

(Optional paragraph)

Well, Simon tells me I out'ta see this Dude, Jesus, well, hey, Ya gott'a do what Simon says, ya knows.

So I was there on the sidelines when Jesus hits the city. Regular revival meeting going on -- singing and shout'n and stuff.

I joined in. But, my heart weren't in it none.

Sees, Passover is the best time of year for a thief. Lousy time to go legit. Rich tourists. Serious coin.

¹ *Another option for the sentence:* “Says and prayer – and you won't believe what he can do with tuna on rye!”

I tried a Big Heist. Big mistake. Cops found me in a bar. It didn't help none that I had the guy's purse in my pocket -- should'a ditched it. Seriously bad move . .

When they stripped me down they found the old whip scars. Sos they figures I'm a career crook. Well, duh.

Now where I'm from they're brutal on third time offenders. The judge gives me the death sentence. I sat there -- stunned. This is not gonna make Ma proud.

Next thing I knows, I'm sittin' chained up at the local jail. Rough crowd. Guys cursin'. Girlfriends comin' in to say good-bye.

Nobody coming to see me. . . 'til Simon shows up.

He's all 'spectable look'n. I can see he's working up the courage to say somethin'. . somthin' important. He leans in, "Dis . . .", he says. "I'm sorry man. I hear they're after Jesus, toos. Don't know why . . . don't know how this'll turn out . . . but let me tell yas, Dis', He can do anything . . Even save jerks like us . . Dis, ever thoughta prayin'?"

. . . Got me thinkin'.

NOT INCLUDED ON DEMO – OPTIONAL

*(Trio: Just hopin' and prayin' and wishin'
that I could be saved . . .
shuwhat, shuwhat)*

*(Note: If Pilate song is used, consider having choir do the chorus of
"Crusify, Crusify and let him die" with Dismas turning around and giving
them a long look.)*

Now it happened in the middle of the night. Friday. I'm not sleepin' so good, cause I know they're coming for me pretty soon. Well, I hear this cry 'bout a quarter mile away, "CRUCIFY! CRUCIFY!" Now, let me tell 'yas, you gots your alarm clocks, your roosters, your Mom's yell'n at yas in the morning, but THAT's a wake up call. Let me tells yas. .

Anyway, I decides to pray.

Now a cell is not a good place to pray. Noise. Smells. People doing there

morning routine -- chained up -- right beside ya. Really gross.

(Piano starts to play, "Just as I am" in the background, p.)

But I prayed like I never had before -- which was, comes to think 'bout it -- pretty nearly the truth. "Lord," I says, "I know I ain't lived right. But, if this Jesus, is your Main Man, could ya sees to it that I see Him. 'Cause'uh I need savin' real bad."

Wasn't 'zactly the best prayer ever said. But, hey, maybe God takes us where we is. .

Just as I finish, the guards come. They dragged me out of my cell -- but I'm still pray'n, sees. They strip me and then it's the whip -- I think. . no, I knows -- I said a bad word then -- but I'm still pray'n . . .

They gave me some seriously toxic juice -- you could practically get drunk off the fumes -- to deaden the pain. I emptied it.

Then they stretched me out on that cross. My mind a spinnin.' My shredded back scroppin' the wood. I'm trying not to look as the hammer fell. *(Off stage, hammer)* Really bad thud, ya knows?

With each crash pieces of my flesh spattered around. It was more painful than ya can believe.

And, I'm think'n, "Dis, this here's the judgment on your life²."

Here's the reward for your lies. *Crash.*

This one's for all the things you stole. *Crash.*

That Buddy's cloak. *Crash.* That widow's bread. *Crash.*

That girl's innocence. *Crash.*

You stole 'em all. Now face the music, YA JERK!

Crash! Crash! Crash!

Then they propped me up. As the pole fell, my muscles were tear'n in two. Not

² *If presented to a group, it would be helpful to have someone offstage hammer a large spike with a mallet at each blow, rather than crying out the "Crash". A pig iron bar works well.*

pretty. I'm bit'n my lip to keep from 'cussin -- 'cus try'n to pray and cuss at the same time, just don't seem Kosher -- ya knows?

But perched up there like a rotisserie chicken I has me a perfect view . . . of Him. He's stumblin' up the hill. The crowd all agitated, like. Screamin'. . Laughin'.

He's practically dead already. Face bloated. Body beaten.

Here I was hop'n He could save me . . . and He looked worse off then me! Not that I looked so good, dyin' and all.

I was a regular smart mouth. "Hey, save yourself and us too, if yous is the Christ!" He just shrugged.

Now, sees, I'm up there in agony and so's He.

But look'n at Him, I start think'n . . 'bout all the stuff I done wrong. Got nothin' better to do. Think'n 'bout Ma. . . 'bout all the things I stole. I grimaced . . . and not just 'causa the pain, neither.

*(Trio: Just hoping and prayin' and wishin'
that I could be saved . . .)
(shuwhat, shuwhat)*

Just think'n, 'bout this Jesus, whose dyin' right beside me. Ya knows? Why? He ain't done nothin' wrong. I did. I lied and cheated and stole every day of my life.

Don't seem right, 'ya knows?

Anyway, I'm fightin' off the pain. Gasp'n for air. Wish'n for a drink – wish'n for a second and a third and a forth drink, actually – and I'm look'n at Him.

Looked down. At the people who hate 'im. Enjoyin' the 'spectacle. Jeering. Pounding their jests like they're at a Tarzan convention.

I looks at the people that loved 'im. No girl'd cry like that for me. Well, maybe . . . Ma.

I looks up. The skies black. "Dis", I says to meself, "Your hearts prob'ly as black as that there sky. What'aya doing, Dis? Gonna meet God and you're Dis'n on His
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Main Man.”

"Man," I think, "I sure wish Jesus could save me?" Then I get's me this here new thought . . . "Maybe He can. . ."

Maybe he might put in a good word for me with God. I didn't really want to face Him on my record. Ya knows?

Now, the other thief's givin' it to Him again: "Heys, ain't ya the Christ?", he says: "Save yourself and us, too!"

But this time, I couldn't take it none. "Don't yas fear God?", I yells. "We're getting what we deserve, Man! But He ain't done nothing wrong! Nothin'!"

My body's heaving. I'm gasp'n for air. But there was one more thing I had to say. One more thing to do: "Hey, Jesus! Yo! Remember mes when you come into your Kingdom!"

He looks over: "Dismas, today . . you's gonna be with me in paradise!"

Then he smiled. One lost sheep had come home.

Ya knows, I told yas I never did 'nothin' for Jesus. But I think . . maybe. . maybe, I did. . . I made Him smile.

OPTIONAL SECTION – NOT ON DEMO MP3

An hour later the guards comes and brakes me legs. Unable to breath, I died within minutes.

The first thing I sees is Him.

Glowing robes of white. Surrounded by angels. He looked better.

Some-a' the angels does a double-take when they sees me. Like: "*What's he doing here?*"

I'm wonderin' the same thing. They didn't understand. Neither did I.

Jesus runs over: "Dismas, You're the first!" Gives me a hug. He gives me a seriously white T-shirt. Very cool threads – Egyptian cotton, I think.

I looked around tryin' to take it all in -- the angels, the threads, the no pain part – which was good. I finally says: ". . . The first? . . . The first, *uh, what?*"

"The first saved at the cross."

"Huh?", I says. "What's so special about the cross?" I sure didn't like it, none.

"Well," He says. "That's where the world will see that I love 'em. That's where they'll see I'd die for 'im. It's where they'll go to gets to God. It's where My blood'll cover all their sins."

"All my sins!?!", I says. . . That's a power lot of sin.

His smile got even bigger . . ." And a whole lot more."

End optional section.

So, that's how I got saved.

In my dirty cell of sin, I prayed that God would save me. And He did.

(Use hammer and spike -- or hammer and iron or tent stakes. "Crash" to be done offstage.)

Sees, at the cross, God looks down and says:

"Humph! Here's the reward for mankind's lies. *Crash.*

This one's for their rebellion. *Crash!*

This is for all the things they stole. *Crash!*

Their innocence. Their devotion to Me. Their love. *Crash! Crash! Crash!*

Mankind stole 'em all!

Now, My Son 'll face the music. *Crash!*

My Son 'll pay the price! *Crash!*

My Son will take the pain of My judgment!" *Crash! Crash! Crash!"*

Now, whatever you've done in your life, He wants yous think'n too. I don't know

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what you have done, but you can't be much worse than me. . 'Lessen maybe you went into politics. . .

Some people's think: "I'm not good enough for Him. I'll get what I deserve."

What kind'a fool wants to get what they deserve?

Let me tell yas . . the people who thought they were "good enough" – they killed 'im. .

The only people He takes are ones WHO KNOWS they're not good enough! Foul-ups. Failures. Sinners.

People like me.

Maybe people like yous, too . .

Everybody looks up at Him on that cross, gott'a say: "What'll I do with this here Jesus, Dude?" Some jeer. Others cry. Some shrug and move on.

Me? I cries out for mercy, sees. 'Cause I needed sav'n real bad, ya knows?

And whether you're 50 years or 50 minutes from death, He wants you, too . . . to holds yas with those miracle hands of His. But, He ain't no thief -- like me . . . sees . . . He paid the full price.

For yous. . .

(Song at back)

(He may hold out his hands, marked with makeup scars where stakes were placed).

The Thief
(Version 2: Shortened)

Author's Performance Suggestions: See intro.

Yas won't find my name in the Gospels.

'Cause I never did 'noth'n for Jesus. Yet, He did everything for me.

I'm the thief on the cross. Name's Johnny. Johnny Dismas.

(Girls trio below – NOTE INCLUDED ON DEMO YET)

(Johnny Dismas,

You're no angel,

You're a rouge and you're a lying thief.

But you changed on the tree to a point of simple belief . . .

shanna-na shanna-na) *(to the tune of "Johnny Angel")*

Catholics say I'm the Patron Saint of Thieves. Not 'zactly what Ma wanted. But yas take what yas can get.

At 15 I'm on the streets with a bottle and my friends and the fastest fingers this side of Damascus.

We had quite a little group. Legs Lazarus. Harry the Horsetrader. . . When they caught him pitchin' ponies, they horse-whipped him. . . . I guess there was some kinda justice in that . . . don't knows for sure.

Now I started hearin' stories -- 'bout Him, Jesus. Wild stuff yous won't believe. Jesus touches lepers – lepers! – and their clean! Touches the blind, they sees. Let me tells yas, Jesus' got hands a guy can respect.

Nows, it was Passover. Rich tourists. Serious coin. I tries me a Big Heist. Big mistake. Cops found me in a bar. With the goods.

The Judge . . he gives me the death sentence. Not good.

Next thing I knows, I'm chained up at the local jail.

Middle of the night . . . I hear's it 'bout a half mile away: "CRUCIFY! CRUCIFY!" Now, let me tell 'yas, you gots your alarm clocks, your roosters, your Mom's yell'n at yas in the morning, but THAT's a wake up call. Let me tells yas. . .

Anyway, I decides to pray.

Now a cell is not a good place to pray. Noise. Smells. People doing there morning routine -- chained up -- right beside ya. Really gross.

(Piano starts to play, "Just as I am" in the background, p.)

But I prayed like I never had before -- which was, come to think 'bout it -- is pretty nearly the truth. "Lord," I says, "I know I ain't lived right. But, if this Jesus, is your Main Man, could ya sees to it that I see Him? 'Cause 'uh, I need savin' real bad."

Not 'zactly the best prayer ever said. But, maybe God takes us where we is. . .

Right after that the guards come in.

They whip me. Then they take me out to that cross. My head a spinnin'. My shredded back scappin' the wood. Screamin'. Cryin'. . Prayin'.

With each crash pieces of my flesh, I'm think'n: "Dis, this here's the judgment on your sorry, lousy life³!"

Here's the reward for your lies. *Crash*. This one's for all the things you stole. *Crash*. That Buddy's cloak. *Crash*. That widow's bread. *Crash*. That girl's innocence. *Crash*. You stole 'em all. Now face the music, ya jerk! *Crash!*
Crash! Crash!

Then they propped me up. As the pole fell, my muscles are tear'n in two. More painful than anything yas can imagine.

But perched up there like a rotisserie chicken I gots me a perfect view . . . of Him.

Comin' up the hill. He looked worse off then me! Not that I looked so good, dyin' and all.

Me and the other thief gave Him what for, just like most everybody else.

Now, sees, I'm up there in agony. Gasp'n for air. Wish'n for a drink. And I'm look'n at Him. . . What's He doing here, anyway?

I looks up. The skies black. Dis, I says to meself, "Your hearts prob'ly black as that there sky. What'ya doing, Dis? Gonna meet God and you're Dis'n on His Main Man."

³ *Best to have someone offstage hammer a large peace of pig iron or similar metal at each blow.*

The other thief's still hassling Him. But this time, I couldn't take it none. "Don't yas fear God?", I yells. "We're getting what we deserve! But He ain't done nothing wrong! Nothin'!"

My body's heaving. But there was one more thing I had to say: "Hey, Yo! Jesus! Remember Me's when you come into your Kingdom!"

He looks over: "Dismas, today . . . you's gonna be with me in paradise!"

Then He smiled.

Ya knows, I told yas I never did 'nothin' for Jesus. But yas, maybe I did . . . I made Him smile.

So, that's how I got saved.

In my dirty cell of sin, I prayed that God would save me. And He did.

(Use hammer and spike -- or tent stakes -- again. "Crash" to be done offstage.)

Sees, at the cross, God looks down and says:

"Humph! Here's the reward for all the things mankind stole.
Crash! Their innocence. *Crash!* Their devotion to Me. *Crash!*
Their love. *Crash!*

Mankind stole 'em all! Now, My Son 'll face the music. *Crash!* My Son 'll pay the price! *Crash!* My Son will take the pain of My judgment!" *Crash! Crash! Crash!*"

Now, whatever you've done in your life, He wants yous think'n too.

Everybody looks up at Him on that cross gott'a say: "What'll I do with this here Jesus?"

Some jeer. Some shrug and move on. Mes? I cries out for mercy, sees. 'Cause I need sav'n real bad.

He wants you, toos . . . to touch you with those miracle hands of His.
But, He ain't no thief . . . sees . . . He paid the price.

For yous. . .

(Hands should be marked with scars where stakes were placed).

The Thief's Song

1 (girls trio in brackets)
Didn't listen to ma Momma,
didn't listen to the law,
Cause I grabbed everything
I ever saw,
Momma would tell me,
"Johnny be good"
(*Falsetto*)
but I was the terror of the
neighborhood.

(chorus -- girls trio)
(Johnny, Johnny be good tonight)
(replay base)
(Well He's running from the Man,
Running from his past,
Running to nowhere,
and getting there fast,
Running, runnin' runnin'
Running just for the blast!
(Johnny, Johnny be good tonight)
(replay bass)

2 Living for the bottle,
living for some fun,
With every drink,
I'd think
Hey, I'm on the run.
And then one day,
my sins found me out,
caught with the goods,
while I was out an' about,
(Jonnie, Jonnie your in trouble tonight)
(chorus)
(We'll he's . . .
Running real fast,
Running from the law
But the Man's got'em with his big fat paws
Runnin', runnin', runnin'
runnin' all time, ...
But Johnny, Johnny it's the end of the line!)
(reprise base)

3 Well,
Sometimes thieves get lucky
'n justice can't win
'cause who should I see
but the ransom for my sin!

Now, Jesus, ya' know I must confess
that my whole dang life's an awful mess
You are righteous
and I am unclean,
and I sure need savin',
if you know what I mean.

(Johnny, Johnny be good tonight)
(reprise)
(Well, he's
running to Jesus
running to God,
running with a life, that's awful flawed,
running with a past like a Boy Named Sue,
cause when you need help,
(Johnny) (only Jesus will do.!)
(Johnny, Johnny be good tonight)

4 Well His smile lit up the darken' sky
And I could swear,
I saw tears in His eyes
He gave me hope, as He said to me:
"You'll be in paradise with me!"
(Johnny, in paradise tonight!)
(chorus)
We'll he's
Running to Messiah
Running real fast,
Running 'cause he's 'bout to breathe his last,
Running, Running, Running,
Runnin' to God at last.
(Johnny, in paradise tonight.)

5 (One more time – AND IN MOST CASES DONT– It's repetitive – if repeated, consider having one of the girls do it, Gospel style)

Well Mercy leaves Justice behind in the dust
because of the power of the One that we trust,
Whatever your problems - whatever you've done

RIT. Just Call on Jesus,
RIT. 'Cause He's God's son,

(all on exit from stage; music fades)

Well run to Messiah
Runnin' real fast,
'cause God loves sinners, in spite of their past,
Running, running, running,
Runnin' to God at last.

RIT Running,
Runnin' to God at last.