

THE CASE OF THE CONSPICUOUS CROSS

by Keith Ellerbrock



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The Case of the Conspicuous Cross

A Lenten play about commitment

by Keith Ellerbrock

CAST OF CHARACTERS

JESUS: Our Lord and Savior. He is kind and gentle, yet strong and in control of all situations.

SAM: Your typical young, upwardly mobile professional. Sam has lived a pretty self-centered life. But in the first scene, through the power of the Holy Spirit working through the gospel message, he's apprehended by the Lord. Faith begins to burn in his heart. He's still pretty rough around the edges, and a lot of the self-centeredness remains at first. Yet he's enthusiastic in wanting to serve his Savior. Sam will find out, however, that serving the Savior isn't as easy as he'd first thought! During the course of the drama, Sam develops and matures in his Christian walk.

SAM'S BOSS: Unnamed in the drama. This part may be played by a male or a female, although it was originally written with an overbearing-type male in mind. Sam's boss is somewhat unscrupulous and cutthroat. He doesn't consider individual people or the consequences of his dealings with them. He's only concerned with the bottom line: money! Consequently, he doesn't think too much of Sam's cross, or of whom it represents.

PAMELA: Sam's girlfriend. She isn't necessarily a "bad girl" by worldly standards. In fact, in the eyes of the world, she's a very nice, intelligent, sensible young woman with an engaging personality — someone any "sane" single guy would love to have for a wife. There's only one problem: Sam met her when both of them were nonbelievers. Now Sam believes, but Pam does not. Consequently, Pamela sees Sam's cross, and the One it represents, as being irreconcilable obstacles in the way of a deeper relationship. This attitude causes her great frustration, which expresses itself in hostility toward Sam.

SAM'S "FRIENDS": This is a group of at least five people, according to the script. However, both the size of the group and the genders may be changed to fit the circumstances of the group performing the play. These young people aren't really "street thugs." By the world's standards, they're just as socially acceptable as Sam and Pamela. But they also have not yet been brought to faith. They have no love for the cross or the Savior who hung on it for them. Consequently, Sam's cross is an object of ridicule for them. They miss the fun they had with the "old Sam," but it becomes clear that they really never cared about Sam as a person.

PRODUCTION NOTES

This chancel drama was originally written during my vicarage year to be performed by our youth group during a special Lenten service. Lent seemed to be a particularly appropriate time to bring out the theme of “cross-bearing.” *The Case of the Conspicuous Cross* is based on our Lord’s words in Luke 14:25-35. Forgiveness, new life, and eternal salvation are wonderfully, amazingly, and extravagantly poured out on us as free gifts by God’s grace, through faith alone in Jesus Christ. Jesus did all the work to save us. We cannot, indeed, we dare not add to what our Savior has already accomplished through his life, death, and rising from the grave by hoping to secure God’s favor through our own works. (Hebrews 10:11-14) Salvation is a “done deal” in Jesus! Praise his name! However, the life lived in Christ, even though glorious and free, is never easy. It’s never easy in the sense that we always bear the cross of persecution for the name of Christ, hard choices for the name of Christ and, sometimes, heart-wrenching sacrifices for the name of Christ.

Being “in Christ” is the most marvelous experience there is. The rewards of God’s grace in Jesus, here and in eternity, are beyond compare. But, as Sam finds out during the course of the following little drama (through sometimes bitter experience!), there are things that we lose as a consequence of gaining the life that is truly life. Even so, toward the end of the play, Sam discovers more fully the scriptural truth that the kingdom of heaven is, indeed, that precious pearl for which a man would sell all he has! (Matthew 13:45-46)

Although this play’s main target group would seem to be youth, younger adults, and young adults, it contains a message which is timely for Christians of all ages. It can be performed on-stage or in the chancel, and at any time of the church year. The director may want to update some of the slang terms as time goes on. However, even though terminology may shift and change, Christians have always, and always will, experience similar difficulties as Sam. But God has promised us that he’ll be our strength through any hard times that come our way!

May the Holy Spirit bless the Savior’s message in this play, that it might go forth and bring comfort and strength to God’s people.

PROPS:

1. A *large cross*. The cross should be large enough to be, well, “conspicuous” to the audience — ideally about two and one-half feet tall. Otherwise, you can cut one out of a cardboard box or something of that nature, and reinforce the back with wood, if necessary. If your group is really industrious, they could actually construct one out of wood.
2. A *Bible*.
3. A *briefcase*.

SET:

1. A *desk* (optional). This is used in the scene with Sam’s boss.
2. A *table*. A card table will do. This can be used for both the scene with Sam’s boss and the scene with Pamela.
3. *Two chairs*. These are used in the scene with Sam’s boss and the scene with Pamela.

COSTUMES:

Sam and his Boss should be dressed in work attire. Jesus may wear a biblical-style robe or white pants and a white shirt. The rest of the cast may wear casual clothing.

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1 *(SAM is sitting in a chair at Center Stage, reading the Bible.*
 2 *Preferably, SAM is facing Stage Left or Stage Right. A briefcase*
 3 *rests by the chair on the audience side. All of a sudden, JESUS*
 4 *enters with a large cross in his audience-side hand.)*

5 **JESUS:** *(With the cross in his audience-side hand, JESUS holds*
 6 *out his other hand in a beckoning gesture.)* **Come, follow me.**

7 **SAM:** *(Looking up, mildly surprised)* **You must be Jesus Christ!**

8 **JESUS:** **Yes, Sam. Come, follow me.** *(JESUS holds out his hand*
 9 *again.)*

10 **SAM:** *(Stands up and says with enthusiasm:)* **You bet! I've been**
 11 **waiting a long time to meet you!** *(Holding up Bible)* **I've**
 12 **been reading your book, and "pow!" Here you are! This**
 13 **is great!**

14 **JESUS:** **I died for you so that by believing in me, you might**
 15 **have eternal life as a free gift of my love.**

16 **SAM:** **Yes. Yes! I believe that. I sure do. I trust you, Jesus.**
 17 **You know that. You've done a lot of really fantastic**
 18 **things — healing the sick and blind, raising people from**
 19 **the dead. That was really something! Spectacular stuff!**

20 **JESUS:** **I also had to die.**

21 **SAM:** *(With a somewhat nonchalant attitude)* **No need to be**
 22 **modest, Lord. That's all in the past. No need to relive it.**
 23 **You did it, and now it's done, and everything's cool,**
 24 **right? Salvation by grace through faith and everything.**
 25 **I'm going to heaven. Smooth sailing. Looking forward to**
 26 **it, too. After *awhile*, that is. So when do we start**
 27 **walking? You did say I should follow you, didn't you?**

28 **JESUS:** **That's just the point. I've called you. I've saved you.**
 29 **Now you're with me, and the destination is sure. But the**
 30 **path we'll be traveling isn't easy. All those who follow**
 31 **me must bear a cross as I did.** *(JESUS holds out the cross.)*
 32 **Here. You must take it, since you are my disciple!**

33 **SAM:** *(Holds out the briefcase which he's picked up from beside the*
 34 *chair with his audience-side hand.)* **Lord, I'd really love to**
 35 **take that cross, but my hands are full. See, I've got this**

1 briefcase. It's my livelihood. I don't know if this and
 2 that cross will mix. (*Lowers the briefcase to his side.*) Gotta
 3 put the bread on the table, you know. (*SAM chuckles, but*
 4 *JESUS remains silent.*) Oh, come on, Lord, how can I hold
 5 both? You want me to do a good job at work, don't you?

6 **JESUS:** (*Head down in disappointment*) So you're turning back.

7 **SAM:** Well now, Lord, let's not jump to conclusions. It's just
 8 that...

9 **JESUS:** (*Looking up*) I will give you the strength to carry both
 10 the cross and the briefcase. Fear not. Just follow me.

11 **SAM:** OK, OK, Lord. I knew you'd say something like that!

12 Look, I just don't know if I can handle that burden right
 13 now. Maybe in a few years, after I've lived life a little...

14 **JESUS:** Whoever loves his life will lose it, but whoever loses
 15 his life for my sake will find it.

16 **SAM:** Oh, all right, Lord. I'll take the cross. (*SAM puts the*
 17 *briefcase in his other hand and takes the cross in his audience-*
 18 *side hand.*) You haven't lied to me yet. I'm willing to try
 19 it your way.

20 **JESUS:** Let us go to Jerusalem.

21 **SAM:** Jerusalem? Isn't that a long way? Hey! Isn't that where
 22 you...?

23 **JESUS:** Yes to both questions, my friend. And if you're truly
 24 my disciple, you have to travel the long road to
 25 Jerusalem with me, bearing my cross and participating
 26 in my sufferings. But because of my sacrifice in that
 27 place, and my victory over death for all who believe in
 28 me, the *New Jerusalem* awaits at the end of the journey.
 29 Just lean on me, Sam. I'll help you through everything
 30 and give you my joy and peace. You can trust me!

31 **SAM:** Sufferings, huh? Yeah, but you love me, Lord. I mean,
 32 how bad could it be? And after all, you've given me so
 33 much! OK. You're in charge Whatever you say. Let's go.
 34 (*SAM and JESUS exit. An additional chair and a "desk" [a*
 35 *card table will do] are brought in and placed Center Stage,*

1 *with the chairs on the Stage Left and Stage Right sides of the*
 2 *table. SAM and JESUS enter and stand at Stage Left. SAM*
 3 *still has his cross in one hand and his briefcase in the other.*
 4 *SAM's BOSS is seated a few feet away from SAM and JESUS*
 5 *at the desk [card table], facing SAM and JESUS. JESUS and*
 6 *SAM walk slowly toward him. Then suddenly, both stop.)*

7 **SAM:** Lord, we've been on this road for a while now and, my
 8 goodness, I've learned so much, and met so many great
 9 people, and...well, I just want to thank you, Lord. I
 10 mean, since I've started walking with you, it's just been
 11 one blessing after another! I just...well, I don't know
 12 how it could get any better, really. I guess that's what
 13 I'm trying to say. You're changing my whole life — and
 14 I couldn't be happier. Oh, hey, wait. There's my boss. He
 15 wanted to talk to me.

16 **JESUS:** I'll be right here.

17 **SAM:** Thanks, Lord. *(SAM crosses to his BOSS. JESUS remains*
 18 *a few feet away. SAM sits across from his boss, with cross and*
 19 *briefcase on the audience side of his chair.)*

20 **BOSS:** You know, Sam, that we've been considering
 21 promotions around here. We're looking for a man with
 22 a little, well, shall we say — ambition! Quite frankly,
 23 Sam, since you've been carrying that cross around,
 24 you've stopped making the kind of, uh, deals, shall we
 25 say, that will put the company ahead.

26 **SAM:** Well, I'm more honest in my dealings.

27 **BOSS:** Precisely! That's bad!

28 **SAM:** Good is bad?

29 **BOSS:** Listen, Sam, there is no good or bad in an absolute
 30 sense. Whatever is good for the company is *good!*

31 **SAM:** Yes, but...

32 **BOSS:** Sam, I have no choice but to transfer you to a lower-
 33 level department. It'll mean a real cut in salary. I'm
 34 sorry, I have no choice.

35 **SAM:** But that's not fair! After all my hard work in the

1 company...

2 **BOSS:** Oh, and you won't be needing that briefcase. (*BOSS*
3 *takes SAM's briefcase and walks away — down the center aisle,*
4 *if possible.*)

5 **SAM:** (*Gets up and turns toward JESUS.*) Did you see what he
6 did? Did you see what that guy just *did*? It's not
7 supposed to be that way. I thought Christianity was
8 supposed to be fulfilling and all that!

9 **JESUS:** It *is* fulfilling! (*Walks toward SAM.*) I came to give life,
10 and that more abundantly. (John 10:10, author's paraphrase)

11 **SAM:** OK, that's just fine. But what about my car payments,
12 my mortgage, my social life?

13 **JESUS:** I have promised to provide for all of your needs, you
14 of little faith. Trust me, Sam, even when it's hard to do!

15 **SAM:** It's this cross! Wow, man, what a burden! Sometimes I
16 wish I didn't have it. But...well...you *did* promise to
17 take care of me. I guess I'll keep going with it. Will you
18 help me with a new job search?

19 **JESUS:** You can count on it!

20 **SAM:** (*Walking across stage with JESUS*) Hey, Lord, I'd like you
21 to meet my girlfriend.

22 **JESUS:** What kind of a girl is she?

23 **SAM:** Oh, she's beautiful! Really petite — gorgeous eyes, ya
24 know? Very nice personality. You'll really like her! And
25 boy, can she cook! Better than me. I bet I could even
26 burn water! Get it, Lord? Burn water?

27 **JESUS:** (*Putting his arm around SAM's shoulder*) Uh...yeah. I
28 think they were telling that one when I walked the
29 earth, Sam! (*SAM chuckles.*) But what I really want to
30 know is this: Does your girlfriend love me?

31 **SAM:** Well, I'm workin' on it! I'm workin' on it!

32 (*SAM and JESUS exit. If a real desk was used previously, it is*
33 *replaced at this point with a table [again, a card table will do],*
34 *Center Stage, with the two chairs remaining, facing Stage Left*
35 *and Stage Right. If a real desk was not used, the props remain*

1 *the same. SAM and JESUS enter and stand at Stage Left. SAM*
 2 *still carries the cross as always; it's on the audience side. SAM's*
 3 *girlfriend, PAMELA, enters and sits down at the table, facing*
 4 *SAM and JESUS. SAM and JESUS walk toward Center*
 5 *Stage, several feet behind the table.)*

6 **SAM:** *(Pointing to PAMELA)* **Hey, Lord, there's Pamela now.**
 7 **We're having dinner tonight. We're probably going to be**
 8 **engaged soon...but with a cut in salary...well...**

9 **JESUS:** **I will never leave you or forsake you!** *(Hebrews 13:5)*

10 **SAM:** **Why did you say that? Is something wrong?** *(JESUS*
 11 *gently nudges SAM toward the table. JESUS stays in the*
 12 *background. SAM looks back over his shoulder at JESUS and*
 13 *says:)* **Why did you say that?** *(SAM sits down across the table*
 14 *from PAMELA. JESUS remains in the background. The cross*
 15 *rests next to SAM on the audience side.)*

16 **PAMELA:** **Sam, I've been wanting to talk to you...**

17 **SAM:** **Oh, I know, Pamela! I've been wanting to talk to you,**
 18 **too!**

19 **PAMELA:** **No, wait! I mean, you don't understand. Please,**
 20 **just let me talk. This is hard enough for me.**

21 **SAM:** *(Looking over to JESUS with a nervous quaver in his voice at*
 22 *first)* **Lord? This sounds an awful lot like a "dear John"**
 23 **conversation here! Can't you help me?**

24 **JESUS:** **My grace is sufficient for you.** *(2 Corinthians 12:9)*

25 **PAMELA:** *(She hasn't noticed JESUS, or SAM's dialog with him.)*
 26 **You see, Sam, I like you very much. I guess I've even**
 27 **come to love you. But I just can't...well, look at you!**
 28 **You're always carrying that big...thing!**

29 **SAM:** **Oh, you mean...you mean my cross?**

30 **PAMELA:** **Yes, yes, your cross! Anyway, when we first**
 31 **started going out, you never had it. But lately, you have**
 32 **it everywhere! Face reality, Sam, everyone notices it.**
 33 **Whenever we're at a party, everyone points at us and**
 34 **says, "Hey, check out the guy with the cross!" I'm**
 35 **always so embarrassed! We can't even go to some**

1 movies because you say it wouldn't be right to carry
2 your cross in there. When you drive me to a restaurant
3 or something, that cross is always in the front seat with
4 us. It's really in the way. And then you pray in the
5 restaurant over your food — I mean, how humiliating!
6 Everybody sees your cross then! You carry it when we
7 go for walks, you have it on the seat next to you when
8 we watch TV. Can't you ever just put it down for one
9 minute?

10 **SAM:** I could hide it under my coat... (*Makes a gesture with the*
11 *cross as if attempting to hide it under a coat [it doesn't matter*
12 *whether or not the actor is actually wearing one].*)

13 **JESUS:** (*Walking forward toward the table*) That won't work,
14 Sam — especially in the summer! Let me be totally
15 serious with you, because your spiritual life is at stake
16 here: you're either for me or against me — no middle of
17 the road.

18 **SAM:** (*Speaking to JESUS*) But what else can I do?

19 **PAMELA:** Who are you talking to? (*JESUS slowly backs away*
20 *to his former position.*)

21 **SAM:** (*Turning back to PAMELA*) Oh, no one — I mean...well,
22 you wouldn't understand.

23 **PAMELA:** Sam, even if you did hide it, I'd still know you had
24 it. Why don't you just give it up? What's more important
25 — that cross, or me?

26 **SAM:** Pamela, this cross is a symbol of my relationship with
27 someone very important.

28 **PAMELA:** Well, I hope this "someone" is worth it! Look, Sam,
29 I think I love you, but it's either that cross, or me.
30 Frankly, I don't see why the choice is so difficult!

31 **JESUS:** He who loves father or mother more than me is not
32 worthy of me, Sam. (Matthew 10:37)

33 **SAM:** (*Looking at JESUS, somewhat exasperated*) All right!
34 (*Turns, embarrassed, to look back at PAMELA.*) I mean, all
35 right, Pamela. I've made my choice. I've got to stick

1 with the cross.

2 **PAMELA:** *(Gets up, disgusted.)* Sam, I don't know if I'll ever
3 understand you. You've forced me to do this, you know.
4 **Good-bye.**

5 **SAM:** *(Standing up)* **Look, can't we reason this thing out?**

6 **PAMELA:** **Good-bye!** *(PAMELA exits — down the center aisle, if
7 possible.)*

8 **SAM:** *(Looking after her)* **Wait! Pam! Pamela! Don't leave!** *(Sits
9 down and puts his head in his hands.)*

10 **JESUS:** *(Walks over and sits down where PAMELA had been
11 sitting.)* **Let her go, Sam. I've got better things in store
12 for you.**

13 **SAM:** *(Looks up at JESUS.)* **Thanks for trying to cheer me up,
14 Lord, but this is one of the worst things that's ever
15 happened to me. First I get a bum deal at work, and now
16 this! All because of this cross! I think what I need to do
17 is go see some of my friends. Maybe they can help.**

18 **JESUS:** *Those* friends?

19 **SAM:** Of course, *those* friends. They've always been my friends!

20 **JESUS:** They won't be able to help you. Why don't you seek
21 out Christian friends? Friends that can minister to you.

22 **SAM:** Lord, you don't understand. My friends are all right.

23 **JESUS:** *(Stands up.)* **I will be with you.**

24 **SAM:** *(Also stands.)* **Thank you, Lord. You're a good sport!**
25 *(SAM and JESUS exit. The table and chairs are removed at
26 this point. SAM and JESUS enter and, starting at Stage Right
27 or Left, walk over to a group of young men and women who've
28 just congregated at the opposite end of the stage. As usual, SAM
29 has the cross in his audience-side hand.)*

30 **SAM:** **Hey, guys, what's happening?**

31 **FIRST MAN:** *(Talking to the crowd confidentially)* **Uh-oh, here
32 comes the cross man!**

33 **SECOND MAN:** **Hey, Sam, why do you carry that thing
34 around, anyway?**

35 **FIRST WOMAN:** **You'd be a lot more fun without it, Sam.**

- 1 **FIRST MAN:** Where's Pamela?
- 2 **THIRD MAN:** Yeah, you guys were always together.
- 3 **SAM:** Let's not get into that right now, OK?
- 4 **THIRD MAN:** *(Smiling, with no apparent sympathy)* She dumped
5 you, didn't she? *(The crowd starts to laugh at SAM.)*
- 6 **SAM:** Hey, knock it off! Just knock it off!
- 7 **SECOND WOMAN:** I'm afraid your cross makes us all
8 uncom-fortable, Sam. Why did you start carrying that
9 thing, anyway? I can sort of understand Pamela's point
10 of view, you know?
- 11 **SAM:** Can we just stop talking about this?
- 12 **FIRST MAN:** Hey, we're gonna go get a little rowdy, Sam, if
13 you know what I mean. You can come, too, and drown
14 your sorrows — if you'll just leave your cross here.
- 15 **SAM:** Well, I...
- 16 **SECOND MAN:** Come on, Sam, it'll be here when you get
17 back — that's the deal, right?
- 18 **SAM:** I'm sorry. I just can't put it down.
- 19 **THIRD MAN:** Look, if you don't *like* us, why don't you just
20 come out and say it?
- 21 **FIRST WOMAN:** Next time, don't expect us to go out of our
22 way to invite you to anything.
- 23 **FIRST MAN:** C'mon, you guys. It's getting late. Hey, Sam,
24 don't say we didn't give you a chance. *(All of SAM's*
25 *FRIENDS exit [down the center aisle, if possible] as SAM and*
26 *JESUS move toward Center Stage.)*
- 27 **SAM:** *(Looking after his friends with a forlorn face as they leave)* I
28 can't believe it. I just can't believe it. If I weren't so
29 depressed, this would be funny. I wonder if Job had it
30 this bad?
- 31 **JESUS:** *(Still at SAM's side)* Worse.
- 32 **SAM:** *(Turning toward JESUS)* Say, uh, Lord, I don't want to
33 sound like I'm ungrateful or anything, but I've lost my
34 promotion, I've lost my girlfriend, and I've lost my
35 friends. I know that if I didn't have this cross, I wouldn't



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