

DENIED

by Eddie McPherson



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Denied

A one-act play for Holy Week
or an Easter sunrise service

by Eddie McPherson

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(Six men and three women)

JOSH

A modern businessman and husband

KIM

His wife

CRAIG

Josh's coworker and friend

PETER

One of Jesus' disciples

FIRST SERVANT GIRL

Confronts Peter in Pilate's court

SECOND SERVANT GIRL

Another

OFFICER

Holds Jesus in Pilate's court and confronts Peter

JESUS

Put on trial and convicted

PILATE

High Priest who sentences Jesus

SOLOIST

PRODUCTION NOTES

Peter's denial of Christ in the New Testament is paralleled with a modern man's denial to his friends that he has become a Christian. In each of these men's hearts, Jesus is the most important thing to them. But on the outside, fear leads them to reject the Savior when certain people confront them. Yet through it all, Jesus' unconditional passion for his children shines through as he embraces them with a love that could only come from a forgiving heavenly Father.

This short piece is easy to perform anywhere. Stage Left is where the modern-day scenes take place; Stage Right, the biblical scenes. If available, the area where Jesus is initially brought out should be elevated. You will need a chair and a telephone on the modern side at Stage Left. The stage can be that simple, or you may add more details as you wish.

The biblical characters should wear full biblical costumes to place the audience in the correct time and contrast effectively with the modern-day characters. The modern-day characters wear contemporary clothing. Josh should wear a dress shirt and tie and have a blazer for changing into later. Craig also wears a shirt and tie to start. Later he changes into a golf shirt. Kim should wear a nice dress.

The soloist sings the song "O How I Love Jesus." The lyrics were written by Frederick Whitfield, 1855. The music is a nineteenth-century American melody by an anonymous composer. It may be found in hymnals or collections of gospel songs. It is widely available on the Internet as well. The soloist may sing a cappella or with piano accompaniment. He/she stands extreme Stage Left or extreme Stage Right.

A few props are required: a Bible for Kim, a briefcase for Josh, a set of golf clubs and a cell phone for Craig, and a length of cord or rope to tie Jesus' hands together behind his back.

Two sound effects are needed: a ringing telephone and a crowing rooster.

1 *(KIM and JOSH enter Stage Left as PETER enters Stage Right*
 2 *and stands with his head bowed.)*

3 **JOSH:** *(Speaking to his wife)* I can't comprehend how he could
 4 have done it.

5 **KIM:** He was afraid.

6 **JOSH:** I understand he was afraid, but if he really loved
 7 Jesus, how could he blatantly deny him that way?

8 **KIM:** Peter hadn't planned to deny Christ. Remember that
 9 earlier, when Jesus told Peter that he was going to deny
 10 him, Peter told him, "No way."

11 **PETER:** *(Raises his head and speaks to the audience.)* I could
 12 never do that to you. I love you too much. *(Bows his head*
 13 *again.)*

14 **JOSH:** *(To KIM)* Actions speak louder than words. He may
 15 have told Jesus he wasn't going to deny him, but he did
 16 it. He broke his promise to the Messiah. To God himself.

17 **KIM:** One minute Peter is cutting off a man's ear as he
 18 defends Christ in public, the next minute he's saying he
 19 never knew Jesus at all. I think this shows how human
 20 Peter was.

21 **JOSH:** I think it shows how weak he was.

22 **KIM:** I think we need to be careful about judging Peter.
 23 Look, honey. I'm not condoning what Peter did, but I
 24 also have to stop and ask myself what I would have
 25 done in that situation. *(Opens her Bible.)* Look, let me
 26 show you this passage in Mark 14. Peter is in the
 27 courtyard of Pilate's palace. It was a bitter, dark night
 28 in more ways than one. *(They freeze as PETER addresses*
 29 *the audience.)*

30 **PETER:** *(Again looks out to the audience.)* My soul is heavy with
 31 sorrow and grief as I wonder what is happening to my
 32 master. They are holding him just up there. He's being
 33 questioned as I speak. How I wish I could be there by
 34 his side. I'd turn to John for solace, but he's gone. I feel
 35 very alone right now. *(He freezes.)*

1 **KIM:** (*Unfreezes as she speaks, then freezes again.*) As Peter
 2 looked around for John, he noticed a servant girl there
 3 holding open the gate and staring at him. He tried to
 4 ignore her, but it was impossible. (*Two SERVANT GIRLS*
 5 *enter, staring intently at PETER, who unfreezes.*)

6 **PETER:** (*Uncomfortable*) Is there something I can do for you?

7 **SECOND SERVANT GIRL:** There is nothing.

8 **FIRST SERVANT GIRL:** (*To SECOND SERVANT GIRL*) The
 9 man who is on trial this very minute — (*Pointing to*
 10 *PETER*) I think that man is one of his disciples.

11 **SECOND SERVANT GIRL:** Can you be sure? (*SERVANT*
 12 *GIRLS freeze as PETER talks to audience.*)

13 **PETER:** (*To audience*) She knew. But how could she possibly
 14 know anything about me? I've been very careful to keep
 15 my distance from all that is going on tonight. (*Turns to*
 16 *FIRST SERVANT GIRL.*) Why do you say I am one of his
 17 disciples? I don't know why you are saying that.

18 **FIRST SERVANT GIRL:** (*Unfreezing*) The man they call Jesus
 19 of Nazareth, whom they arrested. I saw you with him
 20 earlier.

21 **PETER:** You must be thinking of someone else. If you'll
 22 excuse me. (*SERVANT GIRLS exit. PETER crosses and puts*
 23 *out his hands as though he's warming them by a fire. He speaks*
 24 *to the audience.*) How could I have lied that way? Of course
 25 I'm afraid. But my love for Christ should always
 26 outweigh my fear of those who are against him. (*He*
 27 *freezes.*)

28 **SOLOIST:** (*Singing*) O how I love Jesus,

29 O how I love Jesus,

30 O how I love Jesus,

31 Because he first loved me!

32 **KIM:** (*Unfreezing, speaking to JOSH as she looks Off-stage*) Looks
 33 like it might be a good crowd this morning.

34 **JOSH:** Let's go on in so we can find a good seat.

35 **KIM:** There's one there near the front.

1 **JOSH:** Go ahead, I'll be right there. (*As KIM exits, JOSH*
 2 *addresses the audience.*) I can't believe I'm here. If you
 3 would have told me six months ago that I would be in
 4 church, I would have had them take you away in a
 5 white coat. But to be honest with you, I'm really
 6 starting to enjoy my new life. I really am. I had been an
 7 unbeliever for so long, I thought I'd never buy in to the
 8 whole "Jesus dying on the cross" scenario. But now I
 9 accept it with all my heart. (*As JOSH exits, CRAIG enters*
 10 *and addresses the audience.*)

11 **CRAIG:** There was something different about him. Some of
 12 the others in the office had noticed too. He wasn't the
 13 same Josh he used to be, and several of us became
 14 concerned about him. You might even say worried.
 15 (*JOSH re-enters, carrying a briefcase.*) I decided I was going
 16 to ask him about it at work the next chance I got.

17 **JOSH:** Good night, Craig. Have a good weekend.

18 **CRAIG:** What do you mean, "Have a good weekend"? Where
 19 are you going?

20 **JOSH:** What do you mean?

21 **CRAIG:** It's five o'clock *on Friday*.

22 **JOSH:** I'm heading home to, uh, do some work. You know
 23 how these deadlines are.

24 **CRAIG:** But this is guys' night out. No wives. No guilt.

25 **JOSH:** Sounds great — but I'd better take a rain check this
 26 time.

27 **CRAIG:** You've been taking a lot of rain checks lately. What's
 28 going on?

29 **JOSH:** I don't know what you're talking about.

30 **CRAIG:** You've been coming up with some pretty creative
 31 excuses for why you can't hang out with the guys
 32 anymore.

33 **JOSH:** (*Acting shocked*) Excuses?

34 **CRAIG:** Is it something we've said? Something we've done?

35 **JOSH:** Of course not. I've been busy lately, that's all.

1 **CRAIG:** Look, Josh. I might as well come right out and tell
2 you. I know about you going to church.

3 **JOSH:** *(Nervous laugh)* Church? Who said anything about
4 church?

5 **CRAIG:** Steve did. I saw him at lunch yesterday. He said he
6 saw you there on Sunday, but there were so many
7 people, he didn't get a chance to say anything to you.

8 **JOSH:** Come on, Craig, you're making a big deal out of
9 nothing. The reason I can't go out with you guys is that
10 I'm simply overworked right now. Nothing more,
11 nothing less.

12 **CRAIG:** But Steve told me —

13 **JOSH:** *(Short)* And I'm telling you! I didn't go to any church.
14 *(CRAIG freezes as JOSH slowly turns and addresses the*
15 *audience.)* As soon as they slipped out of my mouth, I
16 couldn't believe the words had been mine. I had not only
17 been to church, but I had made a public declaration of my
18 faith in Christ. But suddenly, in my workweek world, the
19 fear that those around me would find out my new secret
20 life was very real. *(CRAIG slowly exits. PETER unfreezes.)*

21 **JOSH and PETER:** *(Together)* The Christ I had come to know
22 and learn to love suddenly became a distant stranger
23 with whom I didn't want to be associated. *(JOSH freezes*
24 *but remains On-stage.)*

25 **PETER:** I couldn't seem to swallow the growing lump in my
26 throat. *(The OFFICER and the SERVANT GIRLS enter.)* I
27 felt the people around me were staring more than ever.
28 And those servant girls. Those nosy servant girls would
29 not stop badgering me. I looked over their way and saw
30 them talking to one of the officers.

31 **FIRST SERVANT GIRL:** *(To the OFFICER)* Look, sir. Over
32 there. He is one of them.

33 **OFFICER:** One of whom?

34 **SECOND SERVANT GIRL:** *(Pointing to PETER)* One of the
35 disciples of Jesus.

- 1 OFFICER: Jesus? Are you sure?
- 2 FIRST SERVANT GIRL: Very sure. I saw him with that
3 Jesus of Nazareth just days ago, and I never forget a
4 face.
- 5 OFFICER: (*Approaching PETER*) You there. The servant girls
6 say they have seen you with Jesus of Nazareth.
- 7 PETER: Don't listen to them. They are only servants who try
8 to meddle in everyone's business. They don't know what
9 they are saying. I tell you, I am not his disciple!
- 10 SOLOIST: (*Singing softly*) O how I love Jesus. (*The OFFICER*
11 *slowly exits as the SERVANT GIRLS freeze.*)
- 12 JOSH: (*Unfreezing, to audience*) Steve must have been
13 mistaken. He did *not* see me at church.
- 14 SOLOIST: (*Singing*) O how I love Jesus.
- 15 PETER: (*To audience*) She doesn't know what she is saying!
- 16 JOSH: He doesn't know what he is saying!
- 17 SOLOIST: (*Singing*) O how I love Jesus,
18 Because he first loved me. (*JOSH freezes. PILATE enters*
19 *the balcony along with JESUS, who is being held by the*
20 *OFFICER.*)
- 21 FIRST SERVANT GIRL: (*Pointing*) Look, they're bringing
22 him out!
- 23 SECOND SERVANT GIRL: I wonder what they've decided to
24 do with him.
- 25 PILATE: Grant me your attention, people! I have questioned
26 this man, Jesus of Nazareth, and can find no fault in
27 him. After much consideration, I have decided to set
28 him free.
- 29 PETER: (*To audience*) The people began crying out to Pilate,
30 "You can't let him run free!"
- 31 FIRST SERVANT GIRL: Jesus will not allow those who
32 follow him to give tribute to Caesar!
- 33 PETER: At that moment everyone around me began to chant,
34 "Crucify him! Crucify him!" And as those words rose high
35 in the night air, I could not believe it was all happening.

- 1 **Yet my fear was stronger than my righteous anger.** (*The*
2 *BIBLICAL CAST freezes as PETER drops his head.*)
- 3 **CRAIG:** (*Has entered during the end of the last line and approaches*
4 *JOSH, who unfreezes.*) **Josh, I want you to understand**
5 **that I'm just concerned you'll get brainwashed by a lot**
6 **of religious rhetoric, that's all.**
- 7 **JOSH:** Like I said before, Craig, there's nothing to worry
8 about. I'm the same old Josh.
- 9 **CRAIG:** That's what we thought about Steve, but he hasn't
10 been the same. He stopped going out with us after work
11 because he said it took too much time away from his
12 family. Then our Sunday golf games came to an end
13 because he began going to church every weekend.
- 14 **JOSH:** I wouldn't desert you that way.
- 15 **CRAIG:** I'm sorry, Josh. I guess I'm getting paranoid that
16 you're getting influenced the way Steve did.
- 17 **JOSH:** If you're wondering if I became a Christian, don't
18 worry.
- 19 **CRAIG:** Great, so I *am* holding you to our golf game on
20 Sunday.
- 21 **JOSH:** Uh, Sunday?
- 22 **CRAIG:** And there's no backing out on golf games.
- 23 **JOSH:** (*CRAIG freezes as JOSH turns to the audience.*) What
24 could I say? He had me. (*Back to CRAIG*) Sunday it is.
- 25 **CRAIG:** (*Unfreezing*) See you then. (*He exits.*)
- 26 **JOSH:** (*Turns to the audience.*) After he walked away, my heart
27 sank as I stood before my heavenly Father. But how
28 could I ask him to forgive me when I didn't feel as
29 though I was yet able to admit the truth to my friends?
30 I *did* know Jesus. It was just that the respect of my
31 friends was also very important. More important, I
32 guess, than my love for Christ. (*He sits and buries his face*
33 *in his hands. He freezes. The BIBLICAL CAST unfreezes.*)
- 34 **PILATE:** Because I find no fault with this Jesus of Nazareth,
35 I will release him and allow him his freedom.

- 1 **PETER:** Someone from the crowd cried, “No! You must not
2 free this Jesus of Nazareth!”
- 3 **FIRST SERVANT GIRL:** Release Barabbas instead!
- 4 **SECOND SERVANT GIRL:** Yes, release Barabbas!
- 5 **PILATE:** Barabbas is a murderer! Surely you cannot want
6 him to be free.
- 7 **PETER:** Yet the crowd was persistent. “Release Barabbas!
8 Release Barabbas!” they yelled.
- 9 **PILATE:** *(Putting up his hand)* Very well! The people have
10 spoken! *(He turns to the OFFICER, who is still holding*
11 *JESUS.)* Take him to the barracks and whip him brutally!
12 *(As the OFFICER leads JESUS away, the SOLOIST sings.)*
- 13 **SOLOIST:** *(Singing)* O how I love Jesus.
- 14 **PILATE:** Crucify him!
- 15 **SOLOIST:** *(Singing)* O how I love Jesus.
- 16 **SERVANT GIRLS:** Crucify him!
- 17 **SOLOIST:** *(Singing)* O how I love Jesus,
18 Because he first loved me. *(PETER covers his ears as*
19 *EVERYONE freezes and attention is directed back to the*
20 *modern-day scene. JOSH unfreezes and KIM enters and helps*
21 *him put on his blazer.)*
- 22 **KIM:** Here, let me make sure your tie is straight. *(He turns to*
23 *her, allowing her to straighten his tie.)* Is anything the
24 matter? You seem extra quiet for a Sunday morning.
- 25 **JOSH:** It’s Craig and some other guys at work. They’ve been
26 giving me a hard time about not spending enough time
27 with them.
- 28 **KIM:** I meant to ask you what they said when you invited
29 them to church.
- 30 **JOSH:** I haven’t exactly invited them yet. But I will. I’m just
31 looking for the right moment.
- 32 **KIM:** You’re not embarrassed to ask them?
- 33 **JOSH:** Uh — no. I just keep forgetting.
- 34 **KIM:** I’d like to have seen the look on their faces when you
35 told them about your faith in Christ. I bet you could

- 1 **have knocked them over with a feather.** *(There is silence.)*
 2 **You did tell them, didn't you?** *(He drops his head. The*
 3 *phone rings.)*
 4 **JOSH: Don't get that. If we don't leave now, we'll be late.**
 5 *(But she has already answered the phone.)*
 6 **KIM: Hello?**
 7 **CRAIG:** *(Enters wearing a golf shirt and carrying a golf club. He*
 8 *talks on his cell phone, standing at extreme Stage Left.)* **Kim,**
 9 **it's Craig. Is Josh around?**
 10 **KIM: Yes, he's right here.** *(Hands the receiver to JOSH.)*
 11 **JOSH: Who is it?**
 12 **KIM: Craig.**
 13 **JOSH:** *(Taking the receiver and covering the mouthpiece as he*
 14 *speaks to KIM)* **Go on ahead to the car. I'll be right there.**
 15 **KIM: OK. Hurry — we don't want to be late.** *(She exits.)*
 16 **JOSH: Hello?**
 17 **CRAIG: I couldn't remember if I was supposed to pick you**
 18 **up or if you wanted to come by here.**
 19 **JOSH: Uh, listen Craig. I'm afraid I'm not going to be able to**
 20 **play with you guys today.**
 21 **CRAIG: What's the matter?**
 22 **JOSH: It's just that ... well, it's Kim. She's not feeling well.**
 23 **I'd better stay in and watch after her, that's all.**
 24 **CRAIG: I hope it's nothing serious.**
 25 **JOSH: Probably just a twenty-four-hour bug. Nothing to**
 26 **worry about.** *(They freeze as the BIBLICAL CAST unfreezes.)*
 27 **PETER: The cries from the crowd became louder and**
 28 **louder. "Crucify him! Crucify him!" I had to go see what**
 29 **was happening to my Lord.**
 30 **OFFICER:** *(Approaching PETER)* **Stop! I do know you! You are**
 31 **one of his disciples!**
 32 **PETER: No! I tell all of you, I am not!** *(The SERVANT GIRLS*
 33 *stand on either side of PETER.)*
 34 **OFFICER: You're a liar! Don't you understand that I can see**
 35 **that you are a Galilean?**

- 1 **PETER: You are wrong!** (*PETER tries to push past him. The*
2 *OFFICER holds PETER by his shoulders.*)
- 3 **OFFICER: Don't you recognize me? I was there tonight**
4 **when you cut off my cousin's ear!**
- 5 **PETER: Stop what you are saying! You are mistaken! I tell**
6 **you, I do not know the man.** (*JESUS, whose hands are tied*
7 *behind his back, enters. JESUS looks over at PETER. PETER's*
8 *fist is high in the air. PETER freezes in that position as he*
9 *looks back at JESUS. The faint sound of a rooster's crow in the*
10 *background. They freeze. CRAIG and JOSH unfreeze.*)
- 11 **CRAIG: You know, Kim sounded awfully healthy when she**
12 **answered the phone just now. Is there something you're**
13 **not telling me?**
- 14 **PILATE, OFFICER, and TWO SERVANT GIRLS:** (*Unfreeze and*
15 *say together, softly*) **Crucify.**
- 16 **JOSH: What are you talking about?**
- 17 **PILATE, OFFICER, and TWO SERVANT GIRLS:** (*Together,*
18 *softly*) **Crucify him.**
- 19 **CRAIG: I think maybe you have bought in to the church's**
20 **smokescreen. You're buying their deceit about God and**
21 **Jesus.**
- 22 **PILATE, OFFICER, and TWO SERVANT GIRLS:** (*Together, a*
23 *little louder*) **Crucify.**
- 24 **JOSH: No! You're wrong! Kim's sick.**
- 25 **PILATE, OFFICER, and TWO SERVANT GIRLS:** (*Together,*
26 *louder*) **Crucify him!**
- 27 **CRAIG: You've converted, haven't you? Just like Steve! Be**
28 **honest with me.**
- 29 **PILATE, OFFICER, and TWO SERVANT GIRLS:** (*Together*)
30 **Crucify!**
- 31 **JOSH: I said you're wrong.**
- 32 **PILATE, OFFICER, and TWO SERVANT GIRLS:** (*Together*)
33 **Crucify him!**
- 34 **CRAIG: You're a Christian! Go on and say it! You're a**
35 **Christian!**



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