

# The Three Temptations

CHARLES WILLIAMS

## **\* A Distributed Proofreaders Canada eBook \***

This eBook is made available at no cost and with very few restrictions. These restrictions apply only if (1) you make a change in the eBook (other than alteration for different display devices), or (2) you are making commercial use of the eBook. If either of these conditions applies, please check with an FP administrator before proceeding.

This work is in the Canadian public domain, but may be under copyright in some countries. If you live outside Canada, check your country's copyright laws. **If the book is under copyright in your country, do not download or redistribute this file.**

*Title:* The Three Temptations

*Date of first publication:* 1963

*Author:* Charles Williams (1886-1945)

*Date first posted:* July 22, 2018

*Date last updated:* July 22, 2018

Faded Page eBook #20180791

This eBook was produced by: Delphine Lettau & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at  
<http://www.pgdpCanada.net>

# The Three Temptations

CHARLES WILLIAMS

---

# THE THREE TEMPTATIONS

*A Play for Broadcasting*

# CHARLES WILLIAMS

---

## CHARACTERS

PILATE  
CAIAPHAS  
HEROD  
JOHN THE BAPTIST  
THE VOICE OF CHRIST  
THE EVIL ONE  
JUDAS  
CLAUDIA  
Chorus

---

## THE THREE TEMPTATIONS

*The voices of three men and a woman talking*

FIRST MAN. But what then is to-morrow?

SECOND MAN. To-day is the Feast of All Saints; to-morrow is the Commemoration of All Souls. Some take it to mean all Christian souls, but I think rather all those who have ever lived or will ever live.

THIRD MAN. Or died, or ever will die. It's the same thing.

THE WOMAN. One gets older so quickly, and what has one done with all the time there was? There seems so little left.

THIRD MAN. Hardly time enough to be comfortable. When the war is over I am determined to be comfortable.

FIRST MAN. Can one?

SECOND MAN. Perhaps. But you must take care not to believe anything. Belief and comfort do not go together.

THE WOMAN. Tell me, do love and comfort go together?

THIRD MAN. Rarely, and not for very long. Love—proper *love*—is too harsh for comfort.

SECOND MAN. Yes; it is like peace.

FIRST MAN. Is peace so uncomfortable?

SECOND MAN. Even the peace of man is terrible. When we talk about peace we forget how terribly we shall have to work for it. As for the peace of God—

THE WOMAN. That may be as hard, but then if we worked for that we might find both.

FIRST MAN. I thought you Christians believed that Jesus came to give you peace.

THIRD MAN. And a sword.

THE WOMAN. That was what his mother knew—the peace in her heart which pierced like a sword.

SECOND MAN. That is his peace; there is another kind. He himself was tempted three times to take it. Each temptation, when he refused it, became his enemy.

THIRD MAN. He and they could not live together. The three lords who slew him—Caiaphas, Pilate, and Herod—all refused his peace. They were very sensible; it is a great thing to know which side one is on.

THE WOMAN. But there was a woman, Pilate's wife, she who dreamed, perhaps she knew it. Mary Magdalen knew it; his mother knew it. O Mother of God, pray for us!

FIRST MAN. Perhaps Judas Iscariot knew it, and was afraid of it.

SECOND MAN. Perhaps, if we had been in Jerusalem, we should have known it....

THIRD MAN. If we had been in Jerusalem, we should have hated it....



THE WOMAN. If we had been—if we had been in  
Jerusalem....

*[The voices die away. In a moment there is a great  
noise, out of which they rise again*

FIRST MAN. The Roman soldiers have barred the street; look!

THE WOMAN. What are those other spears?

SECOND MAN. King Herod's guard.

THIRD MAN. Look, there in his litter is the king himself.

THE WOMAN. They are chanting somewhere.

SECOND MAN. The Jewish  
Sanhedrin is coming—some at least; and there is the high  
priest Caiaphas.

FIRST MAN. He and the king have gone into Pilate's palace,  
and the soldiers have made a screen before the gate.  
What does it mean?

THIRD MAN. Wait, and perhaps you'll know  
and perhaps you won't.

SECOND MAN. Pilate has called them to council.

FIRST MAN. But why?

SECOND MAN. What cry has gone through the land

but the news of John, the new prophet by Jordan?

THE WOMAN. My father was once in Cairo and saw a prophet.

He sat on a stone alone and talked magic.

Presently he grew feathers all over him, and changed into a vulture, and away he flew to Sahara.

THIRD MAN. Your father! This is not that kind of prophet. I cannot find he has been anything like as amusing.

FIRST MAN. Yet I have a mind to go out and hear him.

SECOND MAN. If you can get near! But if you will go, so will I.

THIRD MAN. Pooh! it is only a cash profit that matters.

THE WOMAN. I should like to go—

THIRD MAN. Do not be a fool!

SECOND MAN. Come,  
let us go together—

THIRD MAN. No! it will be tedious.

FIRST MAN. But worth saying we have been—

*[A hubbub of voices; it stops. After a pause*

PILATE. I have invited you here, my lord Herod,

and you, my lord Caiaphas, that we three  
may talk over this affair. This country of yours  
endures, more than any other I have known,  
shocks of restlessness. The crowd flocks to hear  
any peddler of promises for the future. Now, when the  
wars—thanks to the divine Caesar—are done,  
I had looked for a time of quiet. Do I find it? no;  
I feel a long tide of trouble stirring under us.

CAIAPHAS.

It is true, there are tiresome rumours and strange humours  
everywhere; men talking in corners; sometimes  
a shout, or stones flung. What it is about  
no one seems to know, but the peril is there.

PILATE. Do you hear of the new teacher out by Jordan,  
a mad preacher from the desert? It is said he declares  
that a king or a kingdom is coming soon.

HEROD. Whose?

PILATE. It is officially reported to me that he spoke  
of the kingdom of heaven—

HEROD. O only that!

He is probably one of the eccentric friends of Caiaphas.

CAIAPHAS. What, Herod, do you mean by my friends?

HEROD. Well ... heaven, and so on. It is—is it not?—  
rather in your line? I had always supposed  
that the clergy kept the design in their priestly pocket.

CAIAPHAS. The God of Abraham—

PILATE. If you will permit me, gentlemen.

This enthusiast is becoming popular; crowds  
are pouring out fast from all the towns.

Ought we to take action? I do not wish  
to interfere unwisely and provoke revolt,  
but I cannot afford to let a new cult  
grow up in the city. Duty—

HEROD. Duty!

We are private; let us be truthful; we are afraid.

Any crisis is, for us, a mistake.

You, Pilate, know how you dread Caesar—

the public petition or the private letter (in the street  
a few too many dead, or in the hills

a rebellion spread)—and where is your office and power?  
Gone—so!

PILATE. Well—and so? have you

no fear for your houses, your pleasant gardens,  
your clothes and dishes and carved chairs?

HEROD. Yes,

of course. I said so. I am afraid for my wealth,  
and you are as much afraid for your reputation.

CAIAPHAS. I only then am without fear.

Your enjoyment of security may disappear,  
but my calm habit of belief lasts—

blessed be God—and save me from grief everywhere.

He has settled my way, and day by day I take it.

HEROD. Pooh, you are as much afraid as we;  
only you were so made as to take refuge  
in religion, as we do in money or fame.

CAIAPHAS. I afraid? what do you mean?

HEROD. What I say.

Your soul has fallen in a coma which you call peace;  
poor stuff for religion to thrive on. You alive?  
You faithful? If God showed you a new  
sanctity, called you to a new gain in spirit,  
would you welcome those throes, that pain? Smile,  
brother.

You think you have come to terms with God; now  
if he withdrew that comfort, if some new  
abandonment, trifling in itself, terrible to you,  
were offered—

CAIAPHAS. Are you talking of the strange prophet?  
Could *he* frighten *me*?

HEROD. He does frighten you.

Your soul shakes like a bird in a trap.

PILATE. Enough.

Do not press the priest outside his pulpit.  
Let us agree, both my lords and brothers,  
we are all three afraid. What shall we do?

HEROD. That is it; that is the very word.

PILATE. What is? What delights you so?

CAIAPHAS. He thinks he sights a solution.

HEROD. I do; I do.

We agree we want to know if this maniac of Jordan  
is dangerous, if his kingdom is a fable or a truth.

Send we all three messengers, to ask:

'What do we do? Friend, what do we do?'

If his answer is vain vapour, leave him;  
if he utters any kind of definite command,  
he is dangerous; destroy.

PILATE. And supposing he only says  
what Caiaphas, if we asked *him*, would say—

CAIAPHAS. Pilate!

PILATE.—or would think he ought to say—believe,  
pray, obey God?

HEROD. If our messengers  
delay with him, or come back converted  
or even scared—though I do not think mine will be scared  
—

I shall say again *kill, destroy*. A voice  
prophetically singing, bringing a call to rejoice  
in the high hard way to a common good  
should be choked in the prophet's own blood. Kill—  
unless indeed you want the kingdom of God.  
I do not; I confess I prefer my comfort.

Is it agreed?

PILATE. It is; let us choose messengers.  
A soldier or two for me.

HEROD. For me a few  
of those crafty old tax-collectors.

CAIAPHAS. And for me  
two or three of my priestly brethren will go.

HEROD. So. And then we shall see. No kingdom  
—whatever it may be—ever comes unless men act.  
That we must stop. Brothers, for the present, good-bye.  
If this trouble should last or another should rise—  
worse, perhaps; who knows?—we will again meet.  
Vain is the kingdom of God against our power;  
most men prefer our life to strife for the kingdom.  
Good-bye.

CAIAPHAS. Herod!

HEROD. What is it?

CAIAPHAS. Only suppose  
this prophet bade you send back your brother's wife!

HEROD. That undoubtedly would interfere with my comfort:  
with any luck I should stop it, and I think somehow  
I should certainly have the luck. Good-bye.

*[A pause: the voices of the crowd swell again; then*

ST. JOHN. Repent; the kingdom is at hand.

Repent; the kingdom is at hand.

Repent; the kingdom is at hand.

FIRST MAN. Tell us more.

SECOND MAN. What *is* the kingdom?

THIRD MAN. Who are *you*?

ST. JOHN. I am a voice in the wilderness;

Prepare the way, make straight the path, for the Lord.

THE VOICES. What way?

what path?

what Lord?

ST. JOHN. Love and wrath; he that comes quickly.

Repent, repent! where is charity, where

is meekness? they fled to the desert air;

they sit alone with locusts on a stone,

and the wild honey holds them. There comes one

who springs as a locust, who speaks as honey;

he descends on palace, praetorium, and temple.

Repent! the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

The axe is ready at the roots of each tree

whose fruits are wanting, justice and charity wanting;

but the crooked shall be made straight and the rough

smooth,

and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.



Repent, believe; the kingdom of God comes.

[Voices

A PRIEST. You, get out of my way. I am a priest  
sent to speak with the Prophet.

A TAX-GATHERER. By your leave,  
good people. I am a collector of taxes  
come to speak with the Prophet.

A SOLDIER. Shift there!  
in the name of Caesar. I am Caesar's centurion.  
Hey there, you, prophet, mountebank!  
If I wanted this kingdom of yours, what should I do?

ST. JOHN. Do violence to none; be content with your pay.  
Make straight the way of justice, the path of the Lord.  
Love and wrath are at hand; repent, repent!

THE TAX-GATHERER.  
But pray, sir, I, a poor collector  
of taxes, if I desired the kingdom,  
what should I do?

ST. JOHN. Be content; cheat none;  
speak truthfully; praise and follow charity,  
from all to all; let him with two coats  
give to him that hath none; all live by all;  
therefore let all give what they may to all.  
Make straight the way for the love and the wrath to come!

A PRIEST. What shall I do then, I a priest?

ST. JOHN. O generation of vipers, who, who  
hath warned you of the wrath? Away, repent!  
The kingdom of God is at hand; repent, repent.

THE PRIEST. Blasphemy, blasphemy! Israel-in-the-Temple,  
and the comfort of Israel, is the only kingdom: away!

THE TAX-GATHERER.

A comfortable house is better than any kingdom: away!

THE SOLDIER. Caesar is the only giver of kingdoms.  
Away!

THE CROWD. Tell us more, Prophet!  
tell us how  
the kingdom will come.  
Will Pilate's palace fall  
in an earthquake?  
Or will our own King Solomon call  
on the spirits of the air and shut Herod in a pot?  
Will those who have repented squat on new cushions?  
Will the Gentiles be made the slaves of those who  
believe?  
Will those who receive the new king be viceroys?  
Will the Glory of God shine suddenly out of heaven  
and affright all our enemies with a bright light?  
Or will nothing at all ever happen anywhere?

FIRST MAN. Who is that man?

SECOND MAN. Who? where?

FIRST MAN. He there, with hair of hazel-colour;  
He who is going to the Prophet.

THIRD MAN. Beyond the crowd  
he is come on the Prophet's level; there,  
look at them both!

FIRST MAN. Look, the Prophet stops  
in his cry; he drops his arm and bends his head.  
I am afraid.

SECOND MAN. I am afraid.

THIRD MAN. I am afraid.

ST. JOHN. Behold the Lamb of God!

THE VOICE OF CHRIST. My lord, bless me  
and baptize me.

ST. JOHN. I—bless? baptize?  
I am not worthy to loose the shoe's latchet  
of any just man—you are no just man.  
What you are is terrible both to the just and unjust.  
*I—baptize you?*

CHRIST. Let it be so now.  
The gospel of justice is yours, and you mine,  
and you and all just men may dine in my kingdom,  
and the greater must always be blessed and baptized by

the lesser.

This is the ceremony of the necessary kingdom; thus  
It becomes Us to fulfil all righteousness.

Bless me, my son.

ST. JOHN. I bless you then for being;

I bless you for being with the benediction of praise,  
necessary being with necessary benediction.

Have mercy upon me, my Lord, and come to the river.

*[Confused voices and the sound of thunder]*

THE VOICES. What are they doing?

It is his familiar spirit.

No; it is the king in his kingdom.

It is his lieutenant.

He is putting spells on him!

In running water?

No spell can stand against running water.

Hush, the Prophet spoke.

It was not his voice:

it was above us;

it was out of the air;

it was heaven.

Whatever it was, what did it say?

It said

This is my Son.

Look, look, there!

The light is too bright.

Something is moving in the light.

Flying.

Flying down on the new Prophet.  
An angel!  
No; a fiery dove.  
Get back;  
it may do us some harm; get back.  
Get out of my way.  
I cannot see.  
There is nothing at all to see;  
only a man walking away to the wilderness.  
How fast he is going but how quietly!  
It is all over.

ST. JOHN. Repent and prepare! the kingdom is at hand.

*[A pause]*

CHRIST. Father, glorify thy Son.

My glory was in thee before the worlds were,  
and now I am come here to manifest thy glory;  
I am come to begin the work thou gavest me to do,  
and to bring to thee thine own.

Glorify thy Son

as thy Son glorifies thee; as we are one  
let all thou hast given me be one in our love.

Father, glorify thy Son.

I have seen Satan as lightning fall from heaven;  
he and the world do not know thee, but I—  
I know thee, Father, and those who are mine  
know; thine are mine and mine are thine,  
and my work is begun; the glory thou gavest me  
I have given to them, that they may be as we.

Father, glorify thy Son.

The work must be; that they may be as we  
The Son of Man must go to the desert and the cross  
and the loss of thee. Father, I must unknow  
thee and myself, that the others may know thee.  
Now is the hour when the sin's power begins  
to undo me, but I declare thy Name  
and shall declare it. Father, glorify thy Son.

THE EVIL ONE.

Sir, it is a cold night. I may make bold  
to ask you—have you no shelter or food?  
not even the prophet's locusts and wild honey?  
Money is a poor thing the saints despise  
and rise above, but, Sir, it is good  
to use our proper power for our proper comfort  
and some small comfort is needful for every heart.  
We masters of a magical art can be  
fed by ourselves; turn these stones to bread.  
It is certain you could do so with very little trouble,  
or I for you, if you would but ask.

CHRIST. It is written that man does not live by bread alone,  
but by every word that proceeds from God.

THE EVIL ONE. Sir,

that is wisely said, and yet our needs must be  
provided for as wisely; now some comfort  
may make you the stronger to-morrow to preach longer.  
It may not be the comfort King Herod has,  
but I hope you have as much right as he

to your own; think now a little of yourself.  
What you need, you and I could bring to pass  
easily, do but lose a few moments' prayer.  
Indeed, if you choose, I can offer you greater things.

CHRIST. This is your hour; whatever you think is yours  
propose and proffer, if *you* choose, while it endures.  
Afterwards I will deal with the offer as I choose.

THE EVIL ONE.

Sir, since you talk with so easy a grace,  
bear that I show you, from a high place of spirit,  
such as becomes me and all my folk,  
with what I could well requite kind worship,  
which is my right everywhere in this world.  
Feel now, Sir, how I fill your mind  
with the thrust and thunder and wonder of great thrones.  
Look, in Britain and Gaul and all Asia  
are those that are piled under Caesar; and now feel  
what it were to be Caesar and have kings kneel.  
And beyond Caesar (even Caesar is not all)  
lie the imperial majesties of Persia and China,  
strange outrageous marvels. To have these  
all in one, and alone, is the glory I give.  
None can take it from my hand; stand and see—  
Sir, it were all yours, did you worship me.  
Conceive now, in what comfort of great fame—  
much more than poor Pilate's miserable reputation—  
might you not abide, and your name glorified for ever.

CHRIST. It is written: ye shall worship only the Lord your

God,  
and him only serve.

THE EVIL ONE. Are you not wise!

Comfort of flesh and comfort of grand spirit—  
gust of bread and bold glory—these  
you refuse easily; and these pass, it is true,  
when a man dies, or indeed before. Sir,  
I see you were made one of the true masters:  
Those who are stayed, beyond all disasters,  
on the comfort of safe religion. You have compounded  
with God to belong to you, and bid him rid  
trouble away. He gives his angels charge  
over all such, and they with a soft touch  
upbear them and spare them pain or heart's danger.  
Your faith comforts you much, does it not  
Why, if from this his temple's pinnacle  
this glory of faith, you flung yourself down,  
he would save you from bruising your mere foot on a  
stone.

He who holds the throne of the whole universe  
will always help in the nick of time, will he not?  
Take that trick of comfort now, in God's name.

CHRIST. It is written: Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.

THE EVIL ONE.

Why, it is no more than Caiaphas promises  
his people; you ask only safety and peace  
after a spiritual kind; it was sworn so.



CHRIST. Caiaphas answers for his deeds, and I for mine.

THE EVIL ONE.

But somehow, somewhere, there is some comfort you  
want  
to grant your disciples at least, if not you.

CHRIST. I will send my own Comforter one day to my own.

THE EVIL ONE.

Nay then you will be—will you?—exempt  
from every stress of world's joy: have it or have it not,  
it is all the same to you. Sir, you shall!  
O indeed, Sir, so you shall!  
A little new interval, a year or two,  
and I will try you with exemption from comfort indeed.  
Your drink vinegar, your bed cruel wood,  
your fame a criminal's—an obscene lost thing;  
and if then you mean to take comfort in God—  
no, even there you shall grow lost and obscene,  
seen by yourself as the sin worse than any  
you shall seem to yourself to have done all I will  
and had, more than all men together, skill in iniquity.  
Disciples?—you! I will despoil your toil  
of all disciples! they shall set you on a soft seat  
high-riding and kingly, and cry *Hosanna*—  
all three comforts just there!  
and then you thrust down, and they  
opening a new day with *Crucify*. Hark—  
I will put an end to you!—hark, do you hear?

THE VOICES. Hosanna!

Hosanna!

Hosanna!

PILATE. Herod and Caiaphas, my brothers, come immediately.

This is a worse noise; what is this?

CAIAPHAS. This is a worse prophet than John.

HEROD. Much worse.

John taught share and share alike,  
a just price and equality of sacrifice;  
made our thrones brittle, but he was little  
to this man, who will not spare us even with a share  
of our hearts' comfortable loves; this man talks  
of himself and complete surrender and total loss,  
of the cross for all men and all men on the cross.  
This is total ruin: what shall we do?

CAIAPHAS. I have acted already.

HEROD. O excellent Caiaphas!

Show me anywhere a man who is spiritually scared  
and I will show you one who has dared everything.  
He must act; he cannot wait. What have you done?

CAIAPHAS. I have fetched you a man here out of this crowd,  
Who stretched his ears after Jesus awhile,  
and stopped them presently.

PILATE. Why?

HEROD. Fear—and greed.

Like us. Am I right?

CAIAPHAS. Near enough. Have him in.

PILATE. Ho, you! bring in the fellow in the waiting-room.

HEROD. Is that he on the stair? Poor wretch!

Why, he looks there like any foreman or clerk  
in my storehouse or in your office, Pilate,  
or a smug Levite. Everyman! Everyman, I swear!

CAIAPHAS. He is not Everyman; his name is Judas Iscariot.

HEROD. Everyman, all the same; let him enter.

He is the one centre we all work on—  
Everyman hoping that God will leave him alone  
with Caiaphas, and that either Pilate or I will lean  
down from a throne to give him some security.  
Everyman hurrying to betray the voice he heard.

CAIAPHAS. Do not talk nonsense, Herod. Judas Iscariot,  
you have been with Jesus of Nazareth, have you not?

JUDAS. My lord, for a little while.

CAIAPHAS. You grew afraid  
of his teaching?

JUDAS. Yes, my lord.

CAIAPHAS. You made a proposal.

We now prepare to accept the proposal  
if you, for your part, dare carry it out,  
to give up Jesus into our hands.  
Your demands were also—

JUDAS. O no demands, my lord!  
I only hoped for a little show of goodwill  
and a quiet future.

CAIAPHAS. You can give yourself quiet  
if you stop walking with Jesus and talking of a kingdom.  
There is no necessity for people like you to be saints.

JUDAS. No, my lord; on the whole I thought not.

CAIAPHAS. Be content with a reasonable piety. As for reward  
—  
I will give you a comfortable place at the Temple  
services,  
and ten silver pieces. These gentlemen  
of their grace will each give you as much more.

HEROD. Economizing fellows you priests are! Listen  
Iscaiot: I am King Herod; I will give you  
ten pieces, and a comfortable house in Galilee  
with a slave or two—girls, if you prefer.

PILATE. Iscaiot, I am Pilate. I will give you  
ten pieces and a comfortable title—to be  
a Roman citizen in the next degree of the kind.

JUDAS. O my lords, you are generous. It is not, indeed,

that I hate the man Jesus or am against reforms.  
But we must wait God's kingdom in a peaceable style  
and a moderate goodwill; is not that a better way?

CAIAPHAS. Much.

PILATE. Much.

HEROD. Much—and the goodwill  
will after a time moderate still more.  
My lord High Priest will tell you that in a while  
when you have chosen warily once or twice  
God ceases altogether to trouble you with new choices.  
He speaks from experience.

CAIAPHAS. Herod!

HEROD. My dear Caiaphas,  
we all depend on Everyman. Why shouldn't Everyman  
have his place in damnation as well as we?  
If you think it damnation. I do,  
and prefer it. You do—and pretend it's faith.  
Pilate does, and he pretends it's duty.  
Judas Iscariot is of the same flesh as we,  
and prefers the quiet temporary comfort of damnation  
to the crucifixion of glory: don't you, Judas?

JUDAS. My lord, I ... damnation, my lord? ... I hope  
I am only thinking of what's best for everyone.

HEROD. Pleasing phrase! There, I am teasing you. Good-bye,  
but deliver the body of Jesus into our hands.

PILATE. Deliver the body of Jesus into our hands.

CAIAPHAS. A guard will be sent with you to receive his body.

It is he or you now, you understand.

Go. [A door shuts

Why, Herod, do you talk so?

HEROD. Because I wish us all to know the worst.

The temptation, and the fall—and we curst for ever—is here for us, and for Judas surnamed Everyman.

We yield, as does he, and all the world.

Let the Kingdom perish, if we may cherish our comfort.

Well—I am Herod. I will know what I do,

rue it though I may—but you, you refuse to know, hypocrites of the State and the Church! fools both!

CAIAPHAS. Your eyes are burning!

PILATE. You are out of your mind!

HEROD. No.

Too deep within. My mind sees too well  
the shape we cannot conquer and cannot escape,  
the dreadful inevitable kingdom. Judas Everyman  
is going, is hurrying, is running—how running!—  
with all his greed and fear running with him,  
armed images of himself scurrying along  
there, out there! Share and share alike  
was John Baptist's cry; he is dead; and I  
killed him, but this other horror of abandonment,

this mortal shape that awaits Everyman  
beyond the gates of his neat comfortable heart—

CAIAPHAS. Enough, Herod: let us speak plausibly.  
The kingdom of God—

HEROD. What will the kingdom say  
when Everyman gets to it? there the flurry of heart  
stopped, and the scurry of thought checked there?  
What has it said already? what bread  
of the wilderness—or none? what glory or faith  
in the wilderness—or none, will it offer?

PILATE. None; none.  
The guard will have him; he will say nothing.

HEROD. He will say  
one thing only: he will only wait and bring  
all his eyes to bear against Everyman,  
and cry: *Friend, why are you here?—why?*  
*Why have you come?* O when that kingdom speaks,  
what will you say, Caiaphas?

CAIAPHAS. Do not talk nonsense.  
I shall not be cross-examined by a criminal.

HEROD. You will be yet; yes, high-priest, one day  
you will see the work we are truly about. O  
then the eyes burn and the mind spins,—  
hark, what a shout! They have caught him.

PILATE. Already?

HEROD. Already.

Steady now to your work, both of you. Kill;  
in the name of Judas Everyman, kill the kingdom,  
and save your piety and your fame and your modest  
comfort.

*[The noise of a crowd]*

CAIAPHAS. Quiet there! My lord governor, we bring  
this man before you as a traitor to imperial Caesar,  
because he professes to be a king. By your law  
he ought to die therefore; and by ours too  
because he calls himself the Son of God.  
He turns the whole world upside down.  
Blasphemy, heresy, treason. Pronounce sentence.

HEROD. Quick, Pilate.

PILATE. Yes—but some trial;  
We must have some trial to save my face.

CAIAPHAS. Quick, Pilate.

HEROD. Any trick of a trial.  
Think of your reputation and your place in the world.

PILATE. Yes, but justice—

HEROD. Justice! are you too a prophet?  
A noise about justice asks only a noise about justice.

A SOLDIER. Sir, her excellency your wife the Lady Claudia is



coming.

PILATE. Claudia! What—

CLAUDIA. Do not touch him!

He is sacrificial; loose him; do not touch him.

He is not yours, my lord; he is not Caesar's;

he is no one's but his own. I am frightened; let him go—  
him—it—the thing there—the sacrifice!

PILATE. Lady, if I loose him we may lose everything beside.

HEROD. Do not mistake us; he looks young: he is old—

he is the ancient world-wide call to surrender all;  
our comfort, our safety, our loves depend ...

CLAUDIA. Misery!

Misery if you touch him. I was asleep—  
peaceably, comfortably, pleurably asleep—  
when he came through the curtains ...

PILATE. *He* came!

When?

CLAUDIA. When? just now—while he was here!

He comes and speaks at the same time to everyone.

He came to my bed and did not say a word,

but his face became the face of each of my friends,  
each in turn, each pale, each in its agony,

each staring at me. I knew their pains,

the separate secret stubborn pains of each,

and yet it was no one all the time but he.

Their pains were in his body; and I too—  
Husband, I too, I in him—  
I felt my muscles cramp, my bones burn,  
my head rack as if thorns stabbed.  
Their pains in his, his in mine;  
he stood, and his face changed and never changed—  
he was each and all and none. I was his slave,  
his thing, his nothing. O I have suffered terrors  
this hour because of him. My dear lord,  
do not speak to him, do not look at him, let him go.

PILATE. I dare not, Excellency; look, you dreamed.  
You are not called to abandon yourself; you dreamed.  
This fellow shall not trouble your comfort.

CLAUDIA. Comfort!

I shall never know comfort unless he allows;  
let him send it—O now, if ever, his!  
I cannot bear my friends' pains; let him go!  
Cannot I love my friends without hurt?  
The sword of his peace pierces me; to love my friends  
has been my hope; now—O Pilate,  
are my friends he? is he my friends?  
is he the love and the comfort of friends? he  
love? is this pain his comfort?  
I cannot bear it; I will not bear it; I must.  
Pilate, save me! [*She falls*]

PILATE. Lady! Bear her carefully.  
I am sorry, gentlemen.

HEROD. A woman's sensibility! charming!  
but a little alarming too, if I may say so.  
This inconvenient uncomfortable union of friends  
is not at all the lot that Everyman wants.  
Nor we. Make an end. Give sentence.

CAIAPHAS. Make an end.

PILATE. I must take the general opinion, to be sure of myself.

HEROD. Do then; ask the crowd; ask Everyman,  
ask a multitude of Everymans, all the Everymans  
who are listening now; ask them, ask them, do!

PILATE. They shouted Hosanna.

HEROD. Yes indeed, my simpleton.  
Then they were running no risk; now they are.  
Now he means death of some kind; now they can think,  
and what your wife said may sink in.

PILATE. All you who hear me, what shall I do with this man  
who comes to bring his kingdom and destroy ours?

THE VOICES. Away with him!  
Put him to death!  
Kill him!

PILATE. Go, all of you; take him and put him to death.

*[The voices of the crowd fade*

Are you content, gentlemen?

CAIAPHAS. Let all prophets  
end as this one does—dust on a dunghill.

HEROD. And Judas Everyman with his thirty pieces.  
I am only afraid, for a few days yet,  
you may find the Lady Claudia somewhat restless.  
But time and certain judicious pleasures will cure her.  
Visions pass.

PILATE. How still the world seems!  
Only a slow chant rising from the Temple.

HEROD. As if out of a tomb.

CAIAPHAS. And the feet of your soldiers  
changing guard.

HEROD. As if about a tomb.  
O damnation is a quiet pleasant thing  
at present.

CAIAPHAS. How dark it grows!

PILATE. Indeed the sun  
seems to have done its work and to be on the point  
of giving up the ghost.

CAIAPHAS. A host of lamps  
twinkle in the houses; torches are lit in the streets.

[A *faint crash*

PILATE. What was that noise?

HEROD. I can hardly see, but I think  
one of your men in the courtyard has fallen in a fit.

CAIAPHAS. Why is it all so dark?

PILATE. Lamps there! lamps!

HEROD. Are you fainting, Caiaphas?

CAIAPHAS. I can hardly stand. Help!

PILATE. What is happening? where are those lamps?

A VOICE. Sir, the wicks—  
the wicks will not catch light.

CAIAPHAS. Life and light—  
O God of Abraham!—are going out together.

PILATE. The gods are leaving the world.

HEROD. Wait; it may pass.  
We ran this risk when we began the work.

PILATE. What risk?

CAIAPHAS. What work?

HEROD. We knew it was always possible

we were fighting against the complete and only kingdom,  
the kingdom John prophesied and Jesus brought—  
justice on earth and more than justice in heaven.

If we were, we shall each be left lonely in the dark  
with the mere recollection of our sometime comfort.

Hark!

someone is running to join us in our darkness. Who is  
there?

JUDAS. I have sinned; I have betrayed the kingdom. Where  
is the Governor? Where is the High Priest? Where is King  
Herod?

HEROD. Is that my little friend Judas Everyman  
come to join the great lords in damnation?  
What do you want, Judas?

JUDAS. To give back the price.  
I have betrayed the kingdom.

HEROD. And now you are afraid.  
Well, and so, Everyman, are the soldier and the priest.

JUDAS. I have sinned; take the silver and the comfort back.

HEROD. No; now when the sun and moon are out,  
and the soldier almost dead, and the priest in a swoon,  
it is too late to talk of giving things back.  
The silver, and the girls in Galilee, and the Roman  
citizenship,  
and the pleasant comfortable place at the Temple rites,

are yours; if you cannot use them, can we help that?  
What more do you want?

JUDAS. Only to be  
free, as I was before, from innocent blood.

HEROD. You notice the smell, do you? the smell of blood  
creeping up now through the dark of the world,  
as if we were standing on Golgotha, among the bones  
of the dead who starved in our cities or were killed in our  
wars?  
the smell of the shed blood of the innocent everywhere.  
Someone else is coming.

CLAUDIA. Pilate!

PILATE. Claudia!

CLAUDIA. Why did you do it, husband? it meant so little  
not to do it; done, it means so much.  
The sun is out; thick darkness is all about,  
in and beyond your souls.

CAIAPHAS, PILATE, JUDAS.  
What has happened?

CLAUDIA. Judgement. It is finished. Now all we,  
all we who are here, have what we chose.  
This for some of you was your last chance; now  
the path is straight; now the love and the wrath  
come on a straight path. Once there was a voice crying  
in the wilderness, now there is only dark in the wilderness

and a dying everlastingly, a slow perishing  
and less and less cherishing of comfort; at last  
the stress of the glory is past; this is hell.  
I am sent to say softly to anyone who hears—  
you would have it; have it then; hell  
is always there for the craving, and the having is easy.  
For me, the peace of the sword in the heart drives me  
out among other lives. Time was; time is past.  
Farewell; no prophet shall ever disturb you again,  
nor ever the pain of other hearts trouble you.  
You wanted your own; have your own; farewell.



## **Source:**

### **Collected Plays**

by

Charles Williams

Oxford University Press

London, New York, Toronto

1963

[The end of *The Three Temptations* by Charles Williams]