Act IV, Scene I – timeline task

* At the court of law in Venice, the Duke, Antonio, Bassanio, Salerio, Graziano, and various notable personages are gathered for Antonio's trial. The Duke begins the trial by showing how impartial he is: he immediately says he's sorry for Antonio and that Shylock is an "inhuman wretch, uncapable [*sic*] of pity, void and empty from any dram of mercy."
* Shylock is called into court, where the Duke addresses him first. The Duke says that he and the whole world are certain that Shylock has only let things get this dangerous out of malice. They're all sure that at the last minute Shylock will go back on his cruelty and renege on wanting a pound of Antonio's flesh.
* Shylock says he should be allowed to inflict his cruelty against Antonio because he darn well pleases it—no need explaining it to the rest of the world. He adds that he can't give a reason, nor will he, about why he will show no mercy to Antonio. All he can offer is that he loathes the man, and that this should be reason enough to want what Shylock is rightfully owed in the first place.
* Bassanio pipes up and says this doesn't excuse how cruel Shylock is being—do all men kill what they hate? Shylock retorts that a man would *only* be driven to kill something because he hated it. The two bicker until Antonio cuts them off. It's clear to him that arguing with Shylock is, as he says, as useful as asking the wolf why it ate the lamb and made the mommy sheep cry.
* Shylock points out that there are lots of slave owners in the crowd. He notes that if the Duke demanded of those men that they free their slaves and allow them to live peacefully and in equality with their former masters, the men would revolt.
* The Duke responds to Shylock's arguments with the retort, "Maybe we should all go home now, unless Doctor Bellario, who is the real guy who can settle this, shows up." (Note: "Doctor" seems in this play to be a general term for a learned man, so this guy is probably some sort of lawyer, not a medical professional. Given the terms of the bond agreement, though, one of those probably wouldn't hurt to have around.)
* Bassanio promises he'd sooner give up his blood and bones than have Antonio lose a drop of blood on his behalf. Antonio counters that he himself is the weakest link, so he's the one who should die. Bassanio would be most useful not by being self-sacrificing but by writing Antonio's epitaph.
* As Shylock and Graziano argue over whether Shylock is the soul of a murderous wolf reincarnated, the Duke gets around to reading the freshly-delivered message. The letter is from Doctor Bellario and says he is sick, but he's sending this young man in his stead. The boy (who is actually Portia) has been briefed on the situation and is prepared to act based on Doctor Bellario's opinion and his own learning.
* Portia enters and is introduced to the court as "the learned doctor Balthazar." She's all business and immediately asks Antonio if he admits to his oath with Shylock. Antonio does, and Portia immediately concludes "Then the Jew must be merciful." Her reasoning is that mercy is an attribute of God himself, and earthly justice should try to mirror what God would do rather than simply what the law would.
* Portia argues that if legal justice, or justice as the court would provide, was all that mankind followed, everyone would go to hell, because mercy is necessary for salvation. She adds that as we all pray for heavenly mercy, we must be willing to be merciful ourselves here on earth. Her hope in making this argument, she says, is to soften Shylock's plea for justice, strictly interpreted.
* Shylock's retort is that he isn't asking for mercy—*especially* not from a Christian God, he seems to implicitly add. He reiterates that he's here to see justice served according to the *law*, no more and no less.
* Finally Bassanio appeals to the Duke, asking him to—just this once—take the law into his own hands and help Antonio. It would mean a little twisting of the rules, but it would have a good impact. Portia, however—as "the learned Balthazar"—pipes up here that bending the rules simply isn't an option; it would set a bad precedent.
* After looking over Shylock's bond, Portia declares that he has every legal right to what's owed to him because of Antonio's forfeit. Still, she again asks Shylock to be merciful, and suggests he might forget the whole bond by accepting three times what he's owed.
* Shylock compliments Portia for her knowledge of the law, but again states that no man will move him. He will have his due according to the law. Antonio too is tired of all this talk and would rather just get the whole darned thing over with. Portia tells Antonio to bare his chest and be prepared to go under the knife for Shylock.
* Antonio and Bassanio then hold hands and share tearful goodbyes. Antonio tells Bassanio not to be sad that he's dying on his behalf. He tells Bassanio instead to be stoked that Fortune, usually a cruel wench, has allowed Antonio to die mercifully rather than live like a poor person.
* Bassanio points out that his wife is as dear to him as his life, but even his wife, his life, and the world put together are not worth more to him than Antonio. (Aw!)
* Portia, in disguise, wryly comments that if Bassanio's wife were around to hear this, she wouldn't be stoked (which she is not!).  Then Graziano offers up *his* wife, too, adding that he wishes she were dead and in heaven so she could plead with God to change Shylock's mind.
* Nerissa, Graziano's wife disguised as Balthazar's attendant, also wryly states that if Graziano's wife were around to hear this, there'd be no peace in his household. Shylock adds that this is the way with Christian husbands, and he laments that a Christian, not a Jew, took his own daughter. (And his money, but who's counting?)
* Portia says the bond allows for a pound of flesh, but not for the shedding of blood. If Shylock takes a drop of Christian blood from Antonio, then the law of Venice states that Venice can confiscate his land and goods. Shylock's all, "What?! Is that really the law?" and Portia points out that since Shylock was so keen on following the letter of the law, he's got to follow *all* of the law, including the law of Venice on assaulting Christians.
* Shylock, caught, asks only for the principal of the debt, the 3,000 ducats, hoping for the whole affair to just be over with. Though Bassanio offers it up, Portia cuts him off again. Shylock has already refused the offer in court, and he will receive only the law, just as he asked for. Portia insists that Shylock no longer has any right to anything but the forfeiture of Antonio's flesh, which he can take at his own peril.
* The Duke declares that half of Shylock's wealth now belongs to Antonio, and the state will be merciful and only charge Shylock a fine instead of taking the other half of his wealth.
* Shylock speaks for the first time and says if they take away his means of living, they may as well take his life. Portia asks Antonio what mercy he can offer Shylock.
* Antonio has conditions: Shylock needs to convert to Christianity, and he needs to put in the court record that when he dies, Jessica and Lorenzo will inherit everything he leaves behind.
* The Duke likes all of Antonio's conditions. (Because forced religious conversion is always a good idea, right?) He says that if Shylock doesn't accept them, he will recant his pardon on Shylock's life. Shylock, who is clearly getting the shaft left and right, has no choice left, so announces that he is content.
* From Bassanio, Portia/Balthazar wants his ring (which is actually hers). Bassanio hesitates, saying there's more to this ring than its monetary value. He offers to get Balthazar the most expensive ring in Venice if he can only keep this one. But Portia/Balthazar insists, especially because he insisted so much initially. Bassanio says not but is convinced by Antonio to give up the ring he promised to protect with his life.