

## Lesson 4 March 22, 2026 The New Covenant of Faith

### “The Crowd, the Choice, and the Cross”

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#### 1. Opening Aim

Students will understand how the release of Barabbas and the condemnation of Jesus reveal the depth of human sin, the danger of crowd-driven decisions, and the intentional, sacrificial love of Christ.

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#### 4. Key Takeaways

##### **A. The Tragedy of Misplaced Desire**

The people wanted a savior who fit their expectations, not the Savior God sent.

##### **B. The Power of Pressure**

Pilate knew the right thing but lacked the courage to do it.  
Fear of people outweighed fear of God.

##### **C. Substitution at the Heart of the Gospel**

Barabbas walks free because Jesus takes his place.  
This is not just historical—it’s theological.  
We are Barabbas.

##### **D. The Innocent Suffering for the Guilty**

Jesus is not a victim of circumstances; He is a willing substitute.

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#### 2. The Passage (Summary)

During Passover, Pilate customarily released a prisoner chosen by the people. The crowd chooses Barabbas—a violent rebel—over Jesus. Pilate, though convinced of Jesus’ innocence, gives in to pressure and hands Jesus over to be crucified.

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### 3. Background & Context & Names that Matter

**Jesus:** The King of the Jews- The Messiah- The Son of God

**Pilate's Dilemma:** The Roman governor, who had the authority to execute capital punishment.

- Pilate was responsible for maintaining peace in Jerusalem.
- He knew Jesus was innocent and that the religious leaders acted out of envy.
- Yet he feared a riot more than he valued justice.

**Barabbas :** name means “Son of Father” A rebel involved in murder during an uprising. Represents the kind of “messiah” some Jews wanted—political, forceful, nationalistic.

**The Crowd:** Likely stirred up by the chief priests. Their cry of “Crucify Him!” shows how quickly public opinion can be manipulated.

**Scribes:** Experts in Jewish law and scripture, often associated with the Pharisees, who were involved in legal and religious decisions

**Sanhedrin:** The highest Jewish council and court, consisting of chief priests, elders, and scribes, which made decisions on religious and legal matters

#### **The Irony**

- The guilty man goes free.
- The innocent man is condemned.

**Location:** Golgatha outside the city walls of Jerusalem

**Time Frame:** Week of the Passover

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### The Lesson: Mark 15:6-15

#### **I Dealing With Rejection of the Crowd**

<sup>6</sup>Now at the [Passover] feast Pilate used to set free for them any one prisoner whom they requested.

<sup>7</sup>The man called Barabbas was imprisoned with the insurrectionists (revolutionaries) who had committed murder in the civil rebellion.

<sup>8</sup>The crowd came up and began asking Pilate to do as he usually did for them.

<sup>9</sup>Pilate answered them, saying, “Do you want me to set free for you the King of the Jews?”

<sup>10</sup>For he was aware that the chief priests had turned Jesus over to him because of envy *and* resentment.

<sup>11</sup>But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to get him to release Barabbas for them instead.

<sup>12</sup>Again Pilate answered, “Then what shall I do with Him whom you call the King of the Jews?”

<sup>13</sup>They screamed back, “Crucify Him!”

<sup>14</sup>But Pilate asked them, “Why, what has He done that is evil?” But they screamed all the more, “Crucify Him!”

<sup>15</sup>So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, set Barabbas free for them; and after having Jesus scourged, he handed Him over [to his soldiers] to be crucified.

### **What’s Happening Here? (vv.6-15)**

#### **“The Innocent Condemned, the Guilty Released”**

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#### **1. The Passover Custom (vv. 6–8)**

Every year at Passover, the Roman governor released one Jewish prisoner as a symbolic gesture of goodwill.

- It was Rome’s way of easing tension during a volatile holiday.
- The crowd approaches Pilate expecting him to follow this tradition.

What’s happening spiritually:

The people are about to be given a choice—a guilty man or an innocent one—and their decision will expose their hearts.

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#### **2. Barabbas: A Violent Rebel (v. 7)**

Barabbas wasn’t just a petty criminal.

- He was involved in an uprising against Rome.
- He had committed murder.

- He represented the kind of “messiah” some Jews wanted—political, forceful, nationalistic.

**The irony:**

**Barabbas is guilty of the very charge falsely placed on Jesus: rebellion against Rome.**

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### 3. Pilate’s Strategy (vv. 9–10)

**Pilate knows Jesus is innocent.**

**He also knows the religious leaders handed Jesus over out of envy, not justice.**

So Pilate tries to maneuver the crowd:

- He offers them Jesus, hoping they’ll choose Him.
- He assumes the people will prefer a peaceful teacher over a murderer.

**But Pilate misreads the moment.**

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### 4. The Chief Priests Manipulate the Crowd (v. 11)

**The religious leaders stir up the crowd to demand Barabbas instead of Jesus.**

**This shows:**

- How quickly public opinion can be swayed.
- How religious leaders used their influence for evil.
- How mob mentality can drown out truth.

**This is not a thoughtful decision—it’s a manipulated one.**

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### 5. Pilate’s Second Question (v. 12)

**Pilate asks,**

**“Then what shall I do with the one you call the King of the Jews?”**

He’s trying to force the crowd to take responsibility.

But they refuse to think—they only shout.

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## 6. The Crowd's Rage (vv. 13–14)

**They scream: “Crucify Him!”**

**Pilate pushes back:**

**“Why? What evil has He done?”**

**They don't answer the question.**

**They just shout louder.**

**This is the tragedy:**

- Truth doesn't matter.
  - Evidence doesn't matter.
  - Justice doesn't matter.
  - Only the volume of the crowd matters.
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## 7. Pilate Gives In (v. 15)

**Pilate wants to “satisfy the crowd.”**

**So he:**

1. Releases Barabbas—the guilty man.
2. Has Jesus scourged—a brutal whipping.
3. Hands Him over to be crucified.

**Pilate chooses political safety over moral courage.**

**NOTE: Matt. 27:24-25- (24) When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, (25).I am innocent of the blood of this just person; see ye to it. Then answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us, and on our children.**

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## 8. Jesus Is Taken Into the Praetorium (v. 16)

**After Pilate hands Jesus over, the Roman soldiers lead Him into the Praetorium, the governor’s headquarters inside the palace complex.**

- They call together the whole battalion—around 600 soldiers.
- This is not a small group.  
This is a public spectacle.

**Why gather so many?**

- To entertain themselves.
- To mock Jesus as a fake king.
- To humiliate Him before crucifixion.

**This is cruelty disguised as comedy.**

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## **The Deeper Meaning**

### **A. Substitution at the Heart of the Gospel**

**Barabbas walks free because Jesus takes his place.  
This is not an accident—it’s a picture of salvation.**

**We are Barabbas.**

- Guilty.
  - Rebellious.
  - Deserving judgment.
  - Set free because Jesus is condemned.
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### **What’s Happening Here? (16–21)**

**16**The soldiers led Him away into the palace (that is, the Praetorium), and they called together the entire [Roman] battalion [of 600 soldiers].

**17**They dressed Him up in [a ranking Roman officer’s robe of] purple, and after twisting [together] a crown of thorns, they placed it on Him;

**18**and they began saluting *and* mocking Him: “Hail, King of the Jews!”

**19**They kept beating Him on the head with a ]reed and spitting on Him, and kneeling and bowing in [mock] homage to Him.

**20**After they had mocked Him, they took off the purple robe and put His own clothes on Him. And they led Him out [of the city] to crucify Him.

**21**They forced into service a passer-by coming in from the countryside, Simon of [d]Cyrene (the father of Alexander and Rufus), [e]to carry His cross.

## **“Mocking the King, Bearing the Cross”**

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## **II Darkness That Reveals the Commitment of Christ (vv. 33-39)**

<sup>33</sup>When the sixth hour (noon) came, darkness covered the whole land until the ninth hour (3:00 p.m.).

<sup>34</sup>And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, “ELOI, ELOI, LAMA SABACHTHANI?”--which is translated, “MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?”

<sup>35</sup>Some of the bystanders heard Him and said, “Look! He is calling for Elijah!”

<sup>36</sup>Someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a reed and gave Him a drink, saying, “Let us see whether Elijah is coming to take Him down.”

<sup>37</sup>But Jesus uttered a loud cry, and breathed out His last [voluntarily, sovereignly dismissing and releasing His spirit from His body in submission to His Father’s plan].

<sup>38</sup>And the veil [of the Holy of Holies] of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.

<sup>39</sup>When the centurion, who was standing opposite Him, saw the way He breathed His last [being fully in control], he said, “Truly this man was the Son of God!”

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### Fill in the missing pieces.

#### **Verses 16–20 – Mocked by the Soldiers**

Inside the Praetorium, Roman soldiers dress Jesus in a purple robe, press a crown of thorns onto His head, and mockingly salute, “Hail, King of the Jews!” They strike Him, spit on Him, and lead Him out to be crucified.

#### **Verses 21–32 – The Crucifixion**

Simon of Cyrene is forced to carry the cross. At Golgotha, soldiers offer wine mixed with myrrh; Jesus refuses. They crucify Him, casting lots for His garments, and place the charge above His head: “The King of the Jews.” Two criminals are crucified with Him. Passersby, chief priests, and one of the criminals mock Him for not saving Himself.

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### What’s Happening Here? (33–39)

#### **“Darkness, the Cry, the Torn Veil, and the Confession”**

##### ● 1. Darkness Covers the Land (v. 33)

**From noon to 3 p.m., the brightest part of the day, darkness falls over the whole land.**

**This is not an eclipse—Passover occurs during a full moon.**

**This is supernatural darkness, symbolizing:**

- God’s judgment
- The weight of sin being placed on Jesus
- Creation mourning its Creator

- The spiritual battle happening at the cross

### ● **Why Does the Full Moon Matter When Darkness Covered the Land?**

During Passover — the time when Jesus was crucified — the moon is always **full**.  
That means:

- The moon is on the **opposite side** of the earth from the sun
- The sun and moon are **far apart** in the sky
- A **solar eclipse is impossible** during a full moon

Yet Mark 15:33 says:

“Darkness covered the whole land from the sixth hour to the ninth hour.”

This is **midday (12 PM–3 PM)** — the brightest part of the day — during a full moon when **natural darkness cannot occur**.

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**Darkness in Scripture often signals God’s presence in judgment (Amos 8:9; Exodus 10:21–23).**

**Here, it marks the moment Jesus bears the sin of the world.**

**Teaching point:**

**The cross is not just physical suffering — it is Jesus entering the spiritual darkness we deserved.**

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### ♥ **2. Jesus’ Cry of Abandonment (v. 34)**

**At the ninth hour (3 p.m.), Jesus cries out:**

**“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”**

**This is the opening line of Psalm 22, a psalm of suffering that ends in victory.**

**What’s happening spiritually:**

- Jesus experiences real separation from the Father.
- He enters the full depth of human abandonment.
- He bears the judgment our sin deserved.

- He prays Scripture even in agony.

This is not a cry of despair—it is a cry of fulfillment.  
He is stepping into the role of the suffering Messiah.

**Teaching point:**

**Jesus suffers *for us* and *with us* — He knows abandonment, pain, and loneliness**

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### 3. The Bystanders Misunderstand (v. 35–36)

**Some think He is calling Elijah, because “Eloi” sounds like “Elijah.”**

**They offer Him sour wine on a reed—**

**Their misunderstanding shows:**

- Their spiritual blindness
- Their inability to grasp what is truly happening
- The tragic irony of the moment

They are spectators at the most sacred event in history, yet they miss its meaning.

**Teaching point:**

**The cross is not a tragedy that happened to Jesus; it is the mission He came to complete.**

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### 4. Jesus’ Final Cry and Death (v. 37)

**Jesus gives a loud cry and then releases His spirit.**

**Mark emphasizes that Jesus dies:**

- Voluntarily
- Purposefully
- In control
- In submission to the Father

**Roman crucifixion victims usually died slowly, quietly, from suffocation.**

**A loud cry at the moment of death is unusual—it signals strength, not weakness.**

**Jesus is not overpowered by death.  
He chooses the moment.**

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### **5. The Temple Veil Is Torn (v. 38)**

**The veil separating the Holy of Holies from the rest of the temple is torn from top to bottom.**

This is God's action, not man's.

What it means:

- The barrier between God and humanity is removed.
- Access to God is now open through Jesus' death.
- The old sacrificial system is fulfilled.
- God's presence is no longer confined to a room.

**This is one of the most powerful symbols in the entire Bible.**

**Teaching point:**

**Through Jesus' death, we have direct access to God — no more separation, no more distance.**

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### **6. The Centurion's Confession (v. 39)**

**A Roman soldier—**

- a Gentile,  
a pagan,  
an enemy occupier—  
sees how Jesus dies and declares:

**“Truly this man was the Son of God!”**

**This is the first human in Mark's Gospel to speak this truth out loud.**

**Why this matters:**

- The cross reveals Jesus' identity more clearly than miracles.
- The outsider sees what the insiders missed.

- The gospel is already reaching beyond Israel.
- The centurion recognizes divine authority in Jesus' death.

**Teaching point:**

The cross opens the eyes of those who were far from God — and it still does today. God's kingdom is revealed through humility, sacrifice, and love — not power or force

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**Discussion questions:**

1. Why do you think the crowd chose Barabbas over Jesus?
2. What does Pilate's behavior teach us about fear and leadership?
3. How does Barabbas' release illustrate the gospel?
4. Where do you see yourself in this story—Pilate, the crowd, the priests, or Barabbas?
5. What does this passage reveal about the character of Jesus?
6. What stands out to you most about the way Jesus is treated in this passage?
7. Why is the tearing of the temple veil so important?
8. What does Jesus' cry from the cross teach us about His experience of suffering?
9. Why do you think the centurion recognized Jesus' identity?
10. How does this passage deepen your understanding of the gospel?