

# Spiritual Growth Lessons from Christian Ambassadors

## Lesson 75 – Christ’s Sacrifice

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**Mark 1:1-4 (NLT)** – *This is the Good News about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God. It began just as the prophet Isaiah had written: “Look, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, and he will prepare your way. He is a voice shouting in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord’s coming! Clear the road for him!’” This messenger was John the Baptist. He was in the wilderness and preached that people should be baptized to show that they had repented of their sins and turned to God to be forgiven.*

### **Prepare the Way (Road) for the Lord’s Coming!**

When the Jews approached John the Baptist, asking who he was, he humbly answered them by saying he was nothing but a voice calling people to prepare the way (the road) for the king. What did John’s shouting about getting the road ready for the king, have to do with his message of repentance? At the time of Jesus, the conditions of the roads were terrible. They amounted to nothing more than mere tracks or ruts. So, anytime the news got out that a king was about to visit a province, it was then that the roads were smoothed and straightened out. It was the standard protocol of the day; the way of the king must not be hindered.

John the Baptist, the prophet and forerunner of Jesus, adeptly stepped into his role at just the right time. He was sent with the special announcement that a king was coming – but this king was different. He didn’t come wearing a gold crown on his head and gold rings on his fingers. This king was unlike any other. His kingdom was not even of this world. Something far greater was happening here. Jesus, the Messiah, God’s anointed king was coming! The road to be prepared for this king was not a physical road. It was a spiritual road; the road of the heart. John shouted his message loud and clear, there was no mistaking it. There were things in people’s lives that needed to be smoothed and straightened out in preparation for His coming.

### **Watch Out World!**

From the moment Jesus arrived on the scene, preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom, the fireworks began! His enemies began making hostile advances toward him. The religious leaders resented all the attention Jesus was getting from the crowds. How dare he go around calling God his Father! They did not let up, but ruthlessly questioned Jesus and accused Him of being a blasphemer.

**John 5:18 (KJV)** – *Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the Sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God.*

Jesus boldly spoke truth into their lives, but they were unwilling to listen. Their minds were already made up against him. Intent upon killing him, they just wanted him out of the way. Stoning was the normal punishment for the sin of blaspheme.

**John 8:59 (KJV)** – *Then took they up stones to cast at him: but Jesus hid himself, and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by.*

Through supernatural means Jesus hid himself from the crowd, temporarily avoiding death at the hands of his enemies, *for his time (hour) had not yet come.* It is significant to note that this phrase was repeated often. (See: John 2:4; John 7:6, 8, 30; 8:20)

Though his sacrifice on the cross was inevitable, Jesus was conscious of his limited time on earth. He knew he needed to stay alive long enough to accomplish His Father’s will. With great care his Heavenly Father’s hand was over him, working with him in concert toward reaching his goal. There was a purpose for Jesus remaining alive. There was work to be done in his ministry; the blind needed to see, the lame needed to walk, the lepers needed cleansing, the deaf needed to hear, the dead needed to be raised, the poor needed the gospel preached to them. Jesus’ disciples needed to be trained to take over Kingdom responsibilities when he was gone.

**Jesus’ Time (Hour) had Finally Come.**

Jesus knew when the time was right; when he would offer himself up and let his enemies, who were filled with pride, self-will, and rebellion, have their way. Still, there were many people who desired to speak with Jesus, so the disciples went to Jesus to inquire with him about the matter.

*John 12:23-28 (NKJV) – But Jesus answered them, saying, “The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified. Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain. He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor. “Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save Me from this hour’? But for this purpose I came to this hour. Father, glorify Your name.”*

The decisive hour for Jesus had come. His willingness to die on the cross for the sins of the world was in humble obedience to the Father. For Jesus death was his means of entry into glory. Jesus gave the analogy of a grain of wheat dying in the ground and producing much grain. This analogy illustrates a paradoxical principle, that death is the way to life. In Jesus’ case his sacrificial death on the cross led to glory and life, not just for himself, but also for all those who would believe.

**Hold Fast to the Amazing Message of the Cross.**

*Romans 5:6-8 (Amplified Bible) – While we were yet in weakness [powerless to help ourselves], at the fitting time Christ died for (in behalf of) the ungodly. Now it is an extraordinary thing for one to give his life even for an upright man, though perhaps for a noble and lovable and generous benefactor someone might even dare to die. But God shows and clearly proves His [own] love for us by the fact that while we were still sinners, Christ (the Messiah, the Anointed One) died for us.*

See, while we were a sinful broken mess, powerless to help ourselves, Christ died for us! Yet, as horrible as his death was, Jesus doesn’t want our pity. Jesus wants our *loyalty*, since His death on the cross was not in vain. Jesus fulfilled His purpose! Praise God, Jesus rose from the dead, He is alive, the victory has been won!

*Luke 9:22-24 (NIV) – And he [Jesus] said, “The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.” Then he said to them all: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it.”*

Our *loyalty* to Jesus must be put on the line. To follow Christ faithfully, we must give up self-interest, and die to the *sin* of disobedience. To follow Christ in *daily obedience* reveals to the world that JESUS is truly LORD of our life.

*Romans 6:17-18 (NIV) – But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.*

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**Questions for Personal or Group Study**

1. What was John the Baptist crying out for people to do to prepare the way for the Lord’s coming? Why was this preparation so necessary? See: Mark 1:4
2. What testimony did John the Baptist express publicly to confirm the divinity of Jesus? See: John 1:29-34
3. As soon as Jesus appeared on the scene preaching the gospel of the Kingdom, the fireworks began! What were His accusers stirred up and angry about?
4. Through supernatural means Jesus’ life was spared many times, *for his time had not yet come*. Have you considered that God has also spared our lives, while in the process of carrying out His will on this earth?
5. How do we, as individuals, reveal to the world that Jesus is truly Lord of our life?