

Sermon Based Small Group Guide for January 8, 2023 sermon:
"The King is coming!"

Warm up:

1. Did you make any "resolution" or commitment to change or improve something in the coming year? What was your resolution and just a little over a week into 2023, how are you doing?

2. We talked about the harsh and lonely circumstances that John the Baptist live under for most of adult life as God prepared him to be the forerunner of Jesus. Did you ever have a job that was very difficult or caused you to endure harsh conditions? What was that job? Did you enjoy it despite the challenges?

Digging deeper: (20-30 minutes)

1. ASK: What do you think it felt like to be a Jew in the 1st Century trying to worship your God who has not "spoken" to you through a prophet is over 400 years? If you are them, what are you thinking? Wondering?

Read Isaiah 40:1-5. This prophesy was given 700 years before John the Baptist and Jesus appeared on the scene. It was given before the defeat of Israel by the Babylonians and the destruction of Jerusalem. God was angry at their sin, but already promising forgiveness and restoration and he said it would begin with a man and a ministry like John's. What is John's mission and message according to verses 1-2? Remembering the role of a "herald" (to proclaim and prepare) from Sunday's message, how would verses 3-4 challenge them that God wanted "ready hearts" for Heaven's King not just "ready roads"? Read Matthew 3:1-3 again. Any doubt John is the man?

2. ASK: It was reported just this week that one well-known American televangelist pays himself over \$7.3 million a year. Why are so many people drawn to preachers and evangelists that live extravagant lifestyles?

John the Baptist's look and lifestyle were the exact opposite. Read Matthew 3:4. He looked like a poor man. He ate like a poor man. He was a poor man! If you read the stories of the Old Testament prophets, they were marginalized people who were pushed to the fringe of society, while "false prophets" (those who would say whatever a rich or powerful man wanted them to say) often lived in luxury. John's lifestyle makes a bold statement- that he lived fully for the will of God, not valuing possessions, comfort or status. Blinded by our society's values, we too often preach a Christianity that merely "meets our needs" rather than one that calls us to sacrifice our desires for the advancement of God's kingdom. We don't "earn" our salvation, even by giving up everything, but are we truly willing to live a lifestyle of selfless sacrifice? Read: Luke 3:11; Luke 12:33; and Luke 14:33. How can our lifestyle demonstrate our faith?

Apply it: (10 minutes) In the wilderness, John learned to hear God's voice and completely embraced His message without compromise. What might you need to "turn off" or "tune out" in 2023 to hear God more clearly and live it out with greater courage?