

WONDERS of the Bible

Large Group Lesson Week 2: John the Baptist

Bottom Line: Standing up for Christ can be unpopular.

Objective: Kids will learn that our obedience to God may not always be the popular choice.

Key Passage: Luke 3:1-20, John the Baptist

Introduction & Recap:

Good Morning! Today is our second week of the “Wonders of the Bible” series. Last week we heard about not judging a book by its cover and watched the trailer for the movie “Wonder”. Through this whole series we’ll be talking about people who looked strange on the outside, but were living for God on the inside. Can anyone tell me our verse from last week? “*Man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart*” 1 Samuel 16:7. Who was the story about last week? David! David looked a little crazy volunteering to go out and fight a giant, but he stood up for God and won because of his love and faith in God.

Today we’ll talk about another guy who stood up for God even when it wasn’t the most popular choice. It reminds me in the Wonder movie of Jack Will. Jack becomes Auggie’s first real friend at school, a choice that wasn’t popular. In the movie Jack messes up and says mean things about Auggie to look cool. Auggie hears him and stops being friends with Jack. Let’s watch a video clip and see what happens when Jack realizes his mistake and stands up for Auggie, even when it’s not the cool thing to do:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xEJUK_-22FY

Jack Will made the *unpopular* choice to befriend Auggie. It cost him, though getting in fights isn’t a right choice, Jack Will stood up for his friend--no matter the consequences. There was a guy like that in the Bible. He was a cousin of Jesus and his name was John the Baptist.

Main Point:

John had an unusual start in life. John’s parents, Zechariah and Elizabeth were really old. They didn’t think they would ever get to have children, but God sent an angel to Zechariah and told him he would have a son. Zechariah actually doubted the angel and was then unable to speak until the day John was born. When Mary, pregnant with Jesus, went to visit her cousin Elizabeth, John “leaped inside” her when Mary greeted her.

John also was a little unusual in his appearance. In Matthew 3:4 it says, “*John wore a garment of camel’s hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey.*” He wore camel’s hair...not the most popular of the furs, a leather belt and he ate locusts, which are grasshoppers. Grasshoppers! Let me show you a picture for help understanding this delicious snack (*Show picture*). He also ate wild honey. Wild honey

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means he got it from a tree or hive...not from the grocery store in a nice bottle. Here's a picture of what that looks like just in the woods (*Show picture*). He probably wasn't making a ton of friends with his camel coat and woody lifestyle. But John wasn't interested in making friends. He had a very specific calling.

Let's read about him in Luke 3:2-6

"the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness. 3 And he went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 4 As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet,

*"The voice of one crying in the wilderness:
'Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight.
5 Every valley shall be filled,
and every mountain and hill shall be made low,
and the crooked shall become straight,
and the rough places shall become level ways,
6 and all flesh shall see the salvation of God."*

John was talked about in the Bible long before he came. Isaiah said he would be the one to "prepare the way of the Lord". He would be the guy that would prepare hearts and minds for Jesus! And this fact alone, not his appearance or eating habits, would make him unpopular. Have you ever met someone who just "tells it like it is"? Like if you have a big booger in your nose, they'll come right up to you and say "Hey, you have a big booger in your nose". That's John. He was there to tell people Jesus is coming and you have got to change your ways. Let's read on in verse 7.

7 He said therefore to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8 Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. 9 Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."

John calls the crowds vipers, which is a snake. John calls the people snakes to warn them that their heart is not right and that his words must be listened to! He's warning the people that they can't be relying on their "religion". They have to repent and have a heart change. We can't just show up to church and magically become a Christ follower, no, we have to have a heart change.

People start asking John what they should do and he tells them how to live the right way. Then they start thinking he might be the Messiah, the promised Rescuer from God. John answers that question straight up:

16 John answered them all, saying, "I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy

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Spirit and fire. 17 His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

John's like "Um, no way Jose! I don't even deserve to take off the Messiah's shoes". John had been baptizing people as an act of the them repenting and living a life honoring God, but Jesus will come and provide the way to salvation. John could have very easily said, "Yep, it's me! I'm the Messiah". People were coming out to see him, he was getting a following...that's when we tend to mess up and make the "popular" choice. But John didn't. He knew who he was and who he was making the way for. In fact, standing up for God made him very unpopular and in these verses we see how unpopular he was:

18 So with many other exhortations he preached good news to the people. 19 But Herod the tetrarch, who had been reproved by him for Herodias, his brother's wife, and for all the evil things that Herod had done, 20 added this to them all, that he locked up John in prison.

John made an unpopular choice and told Herod that he should not have taken his brother's wife Herodias (gross!). Herod, a king mind you, was not too happy about him telling everybody his choices were bad and put him in prison. Eventually (in Mark 6) John is beheaded by Herod because of revealing his sin.

Conclusion:

John could have easily shut his mouth and never spoke truth. He could have ran away from the calling God had for him, but he didn't. He stood up for God even when it wasn't a popular choice and he warned people to change their ways as the Messiah was coming.

You have a choice everyday to speak truth and stand up for God. It will be scary and it will not always be popular, but God has called us to stand firm in our faith and be strong in him. That's our verse this week, "*Be alert, stand firm in the faith, be courageous be strong.*" 1 Corinthians 16:13.

Close in prayer & dismiss to groups.

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Small Group Discussion Week 2: John the Baptist

Welcome:

Introduce yourself to the kids and ask their names, welcome guests.

Icebreaker:

In the Wonder video clip, Jack stood up for Auggie even though it wasn't the popular choice. When have you stood up for a friend or they stood up for you?

Discussion:

- How was John the Baptist's birth unusual? *His parents were old*
- How did John dress and eat? What do you think other people thought when they looked at him? *Camel hair and ate bugs.*
- Who talked about John before he was born? *Isaiah*
- What was John's calling? *To prepare the way for the Messiah and turn hearts back to God.*
- What did he call people and why? *He called people snakes because their hearts were not right, they weren't living for God.*
- Why was John not a popular person? *He told the truth, even when it had consequences*
- What happened to John after he called out Herod? *He was put in jail and eventually killed.*
- Have you ever made an unpopular choice and stood up for what's right? If so, what happened?
- How do you feel making an unpopular choice?
- Why does God want us to stand up for him?

Memory Verse:

Read the verse and then practice saying the verse together out loud.

Be alert, stand firm in the faith, be courageous be strong." 1 Corinthians 16:13.

Activity:

Supplies: John the Baptist Dice, situation cards

Kids roll a dice and then pick a situation card based on what they roll. Have each kid on their turn read the card they chose and answer with how they would stand for God in that situation. Go around until all cards are taken.

- Locusts: one crunchy situation
- Honey: don't get stuck
- Camel: a big hairy mess
- John: pick any card