

BIG IDEA: We must prepare our hearts for Jesus

BIBLE BASIS: Matthew 3: 1-10

KEY VERSE: “Therefore, prepare your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” 1 Peter 1:13 (NIV)

THE BIG BIBLE STORY

Watch the video here: <https://youtu.be/7NMHOLPWeTM>

John the Baptist had a really important job. His job was to help clear the path for the most important king ever...Jesus! John didn't clear a physical road for Jesus. Instead he taught that **we must prepare our hearts for Jesus**. Right now we are going to read from the books of Matthew and Luke, but John's story begins way back in the Old Testament book of Isaiah.

Many years before John the Baptist was born, God promised that there would be a special messenger who would announce the coming of the long-awaited Messiah (or Savior) for God's people. Let's hear what the prophet Isaiah wrote about the messenger who was to come...**Read Isaiah 40:3-5** *“A voice of one calling: ‘In the desert prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it. For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”*

John the Baptist was the messenger God promised. And he had an important job: to prepare the way for Jesus to come! But John wasn't out in the desert with cement trucks building an actual highway! Isaiah said that God's messenger would help prepare the hearts of God's people to receive Him, because **we must prepare our hearts for Jesus**. When he John began his ministry he moved out to the desert. Now, most people who want to share good news with people don't usually go out in the wilderness where no one lives. But John was pretty different from most people. You see, John wore clothes made of camel hair and ate locusts and honey. He sounds pretty strange doesn't he? The people were so intrigued by John that they would go out to the desert to see him and hear him preach. The fact that John preached out in the wilderness was important, because the desert symbolized what the people's hearts were like. What are some words that might describe a desert? (*Dry, seemingly lifeless, empty etc.*) If the desert symbolized the people's hearts, what do you think their hearts were like toward God? The people weren't really ready for Jesus because their hearts were dry and dead, much like a desert! They needed to hear that Jesus was coming to forgive their sins and bring their hearts back to life with the Holy Spirit. And that's just what John did. John helped them see that **we must prepare our hearts for Jesus**. But how were they supposed to prepare their hearts? What does that even mean? John preached to the people saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.” As they listened to John, the people realized how sinful they were, and they began to see their need for a Savior. They confessed their sins and John baptized them in the Jordan River. He told them, “I baptize you with water but there is one coming after me who is much greater than I am. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit!” Who do you think John meant was coming after him? (*Jesus*) Among the people coming to hear John were some religious leaders called Pharisees and Sadducees. These were men who were very proud of the fact that they were so religious, but in reality their hearts were far from God. John had some harsh words for these men. He called them a brood of vipers (venomous snakes) and told them that if they truly were close to God, their lives would look much different. He said,

Read Luke 3:8-9 *“Produce fruit in keeping with repentance...The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.”*

Was John saying these men were fruit trees?

John meant that when someone has real faith in God, they honor God with the way they live. Just like a healthy fruit tree produces good fruit, when we have a healthy relationship with God, we live in a way that pleases Him. The Pharisees and Sadducees cared a lot about the way they looked on the outside but they didn't really know God or love Him. John said this to show that **we must prepare our hearts for Jesus**. Did you know that **we must prepare our hearts for Jesus** too? John taught that the way to prepare our hearts is to repent of our sin. When someone repents, they turn away from their sin and follow God. It's not always easy to recognize that we have sinned against God. We all probably

like to think that we're pretty good, even if we do mess up from time to time. We might try to follow the rules and be nice to other people. That probably makes us feel pretty good about ourselves, but no matter how good we are on the outside, our hearts are still like dry deserts without Jesus. The problem with sin is that it's on the inside. Even though we might do nice things, our hearts are still sinful and far from God. No matter how good we try to be, we still need Jesus to save us, and **we must prepare our hearts for Jesus**. So how can we prepare our hearts for Jesus? We can spend time talking to God and admitting to Him that our hearts are sinful and we need a Savior! We can repent, or turn away from, our sin and follow God. Preparing our hearts for Jesus that doesn't mean that we have to be perfect before we can begin following Jesus. In fact, over and over again in the Bible we see that Jesus calls very imperfect people to follow Him and know Him. Jesus loves us even though we are broken and sinful and we don't have to do anything to make us more lovable to Him.

BIG BIBLE STORY QUESTIONS

For Preschoolers:

- What was your favorite part of the story?
- What does it mean to prepare something?
- How was God the hero of this story?

For Elementary:

- What was your favorite part of this story?
- What does this story teach us about God?
- If the President of the United States was coming over to your house, what are some things you would have to do to prepare for his visit? (Pick out a nice outfit, take a bath, clean the house etc.)?
- Apply the previous question to Jesus. What would you want your heart to look like?

BIG BIBLE STORY ACTIVITIES

Prayer prompt: Write a prayer to God. Ask God to help you prepare your heart for Jesus.

Journal prompt: Tell God about a time your heart did not look the way He wants it to. Tell him what you're going to do to get your heart right for Him.

Bible prompt: Read it for yourself: Matthew 3: 1-10. Discuss with your parents of ways we can be different from the Pharisees and Sadducees.

Art prompt: Draw a picture of a heart for Jesus. Inside the heart draw things you love but be sure to draw Jesus or a cross in the center.

Source: Ministry-to-Children.com