

# Matthew 11:8

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? behold, they that wear soft clothing are in kings' houses.

## Analysis

Jesus continues His rhetorical defense of John: 'But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? behold, they that wear soft clothing are in kings' houses.' Again expecting a negative response, Jesus contrasts John's austere lifestyle with courtly luxury. The phrase 'soft raiment' (μαλακοῖς/malakois) describes fine, expensive clothing typical of wealthy aristocrats and royal courts. John wore camel's hair and a leather belt (Matthew 3:4)—deliberately rough, prophetic garb recalling Elijah (2 Kings 1:8). Jesus's point is sharp: those seeking comfortable religion, popular teaching, or socially acceptable message don't go to wilderness prophets. John's appearance and message were deliberately confrontational, challenging the religious establishment and calling for radical repentance. The reference to 'kings' houses' carries irony: John would indeed enter a king's house—not as honored guest but as prisoner, executed for speaking truth to power (Matthew 14:1-12). Reformed theology values this prophetic independence: true ministers of God aren't court chaplains blessing the status quo but prophets calling for repentance regardless of personal cost.

## Historical Context

In first-century Judea, clothing signified social status. The wealthy and politically connected wore fine linen and purple robes, while common people wore coarse wool. John's camel hair garment was intentionally provocative—associating himself with Old Testament prophets rather than the priestly aristocracy. Herod Antipas,

who ruled Galilee and Perea, lived in luxury at his palace in Tiberias with courtiers in soft clothing. The tragic irony is that John did end up in Herod's palace—imprisoned for condemning Herod's unlawful marriage to Herodias (Matthew 14:3-4). While Herod's courtiers wore soft raiment and spoke flattering words, John maintained prophetic integrity even unto death. The early church faced similar temptations: blend in, avoid offense, gain favor with authorities. Jesus's words reminded them that authentic Christianity has never been compatible with worldly comfort or popularity.

## Related Passages

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**Romans 2:1** — Judging others

**Matthew 25:31** — Final judgment

## Study Questions

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1. In what ways are modern Christians tempted toward 'soft raiment' religion—comfortable teaching that requires no sacrifice or confrontation?
2. How do you distinguish between wise cultural engagement and the compromise Jesus warns against?
3. What does John's willingness to suffer for truth rather than enjoy courtly favor reveal about what we should prioritize?

## Interlinear Text

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ἀλλὰ τί ἐξήλθετε ἵδεῖν ἄνθρωπον ἐν μαλακὰ  
But what went ye out for to see A man in soft  
G235 G5101 G1831 G1492 G444 G1722 G3120

ἱματίοις ἡμφιεσμένον ἵδού, οἱ τὰ μαλακὰ φοροῦντες  
raiment clothed behold soft they that wear  
G2440 G294 G2400 G3588 G3588 G3120 G5409

ἐν τοῖς οἴκοις τῶν βασιλέων εἰσίν  
in houses kings clothing are  
G1722 G3624 G3588 G935 G1526

## Additional Cross-References

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**Matthew 3:4** (Parallel theme): And the same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey.

**Isaiah 20:2** (Kingdom): At the same time spake the LORD by Isaiah the son of Amoz, saying, Go and loose the sackcloth from off thy loins, and put off thy shoe from thy foot. And he did so, walking naked and barefoot.

**Zechariah 13:4** (Parallel theme): And it shall come to pass in that day, that the prophets shall be ashamed every one of his vision, when he hath prophesied; neither shall they wear a rough garment to deceive:

**2 Kings 1:8** (Parallel theme): And they answered him, He was an hairy man, and girt with a girdle of leather about his loins. And he said, It is Elijah the Tishbite.