

Can I Get a Testimony?

The crowd, the lake, and the bread of life

SPEAKER	Frank Costenbader
DATE	Sunday, September 25, 2022
PASSAGES	John 6:1-69; John 1:19-36; Isaiah 60:1-3; Deuteronomy 18:15-16; Exodus 20:18-21; Zechariah 9:9; Isaiah 9:2-7
MESSAGE	Begins at 0:56:15 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

The crowds in [John 6](#) wanted a Jesus who would feed them and fight Rome, and when he told them who he really was, many walked away. The disciples, who had met him on the water, could say “you have the words of eternal life.” The Holy Spirit is calling us out of the crowd to come to Jesus ourselves — because in growing darkness, we had better have a testimony.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ◆ God takes the initiative. He made the covenants, spoke through his Spirit and still draws people to himself; it is not our decision that comes first.
- ◆ John the Baptist’s testimony was not a slow dawning about his cousin. God revealed to him by the Spirit who the Messiah was.
- ◆ Israel expected two Messiahs, a suffering one and a conquering one, and preferred the conqueror. Jesus fulfils both.
- ◆ At Horeb the people stayed at a distance and settled for information instead of God’s presence. Information is easy to doubt, and it leaves people unchanged.
- ◆ Many people want a miracle first and faith later. But plenty who have seen answered prayers still refuse to surrender to Jesus.

- ◆ No one comes to Jesus unless the Father draws him. The witness of the Holy Spirit is the only way we can believe.
- ◆ Belief and surrender are different. There is no plan B for eternal life — only coming to Jesus and receiving his sacrifice.

► 0:56:15

Frank Costenbader, chairman of Hope Chapel's board, confessed he was a little intimidated following Lisette. He had not picked a title, "but I guess if I had picked one, it would be: can I get a testimony? Yes, you can." He opened with the prayer of [Psalm 19:14](#).

Darkness, and a coming light

► 0:57:24

"Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the LORD rises upon you and his glory appears over you. Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn."

ISAIAH 60:1-3 ↗ (NIV)

► 0:58:11

Frank believes Jesus is coming again soon, and that the culture has thrown off its moorings — the Bible, marriage, family, the sanctity of life. "Woe to those who call evil good and good evil" ([Isaiah 5:20](#)). Yet he also believes a revival is coming, with many people coming to the light because of the darkness.

► 0:58:51

While he prepared, he said, the Lord spoke to him: *people need to know who I am, not who they imagined me to be*. God made covenants on his own initiative — "we keep flipping that upside down." He chose individuals, foretold what would happen, then did it, and the Spirit still convinces us those words are true.

A pivotal chapter

► 1:00:10

Frank had sent out homework: read [John 6](#). One way to read Scripture is to notice how much space a writer gives each event. John gives fifteen verses to the feeding of the five thousand, nine to the crossing of the lake, and forty-six to what happened when they arrived. Miracles happen, lessons are learned, things are revealed — “and many people leave.”

John the Baptist's testimony

► 1:01:29

Remember that God announces what he does. When the Sanhedrin's delegation asked John the Baptist whether he was the Messiah, Elijah or the Prophet, he kept saying no: “I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way for the Lord.’” His job was to call people back to God and to testify about the Messiah.

► 1:02:47

“I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel... I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him... I have seen and I testify that this is God's Chosen One.”

JOHN 1:19–36 ✂ (NIV)

► 1:03:24

John and Jesus were cousins. “I myself did not know him” means God revealed to John, by the Spirit, who the Messiah was — and John testified to what God had shown him.

The Messiah they wanted

► 1:03:59

Thousands came to hear John. Why did his announcement not spread like wildfire? Partly because the culture was looking for a different Messiah.

► 1:04:42

Rabbinic oral tradition spoke of two: *Messiah ben Joseph* and *Messiah ben David*. Messiah ben Joseph is the humble king “riding on a donkey” ([Zechariah 9:9](#)), who would redeem an unrighteous Israel by dying for them — the one on whom the Lord lays “the iniquity of us all” ([Isaiah 53:6](#)), the one they will “look on... whom they have pierced” and mourn ([Zechariah 12:10](#)).

► 1:05:58

Messiah ben David is the great light that shatters the oppressor's rod, the child born to us with the government on his shoulders, reigning on David's throne (Isaiah 9:2-7) — a national Messiah who would lead armies and restore Israel. We believe Jesus fulfils both, and is coming back soon as Messiah ben David, not only for Israel but for the whole world. "It's easy to see which Messiah Israel preferred," and that preference blinded many to Jesus.

Five thousand fed

► 1:09:08

In John's account Jesus speaks only to his disciples, not the crowd. Frank wondered whether Andrew mentioned the boy with five barley loaves and two fish as a joke — "imagine the surprise when Jesus took him up on that." Twice Scripture says they ate as much as they wanted, with twelve baskets left over. A miracle on the scale of Moses.

► 1:10:32

But the mood changed. Why were they there? He was "the best show in town," and many, fed up with Rome, wanted a rebellion led by a charismatic miracle-worker. "Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world."

Staying at a distance

► 1:11:07

That expectation goes back to Moses: "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me" (Deuteronomy 18:15-16) — given because, at Horeb, the people begged not to hear God's voice again.

► 1:11:42

God wanted them to hear him so they would trust (Exodus 19:9) and fear him and not sin. "God wanted to change individual lives, but they remained a crowd."

► 1:12:14

“When the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with fear. They stayed at a distance and said to Moses, ‘Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die.’ Moses said to the people, ‘Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning.’ The people remained at a distance, while Moses approached the thick darkness where God was.”

EXODUS 20:18–21 ↗ (NIV)

► 1:13:28

Had they made that journey to the mountain, they too could have testified to what God had done. Instead all they got from Moses was information, “and information is so easy to doubt.” People got instructions without the presence of God, and remained unchanged. “This is one of the reasons why Hope Chapel emphasizes the ministry of the Holy Spirit among us.” Jesus preached to crowds, but mostly he revealed himself to individuals.

The lesson on the lake

► 1:15:30

Jesus separated his disciples from the crowd for a private lesson. Rowing three or four miles across rough water in the dark, they saw him walking on the water and were frightened. “It is I; don’t be afraid.” Then they took him into the boat, and immediately they reached the shore.

► 1:16:05

Frank has been on the Sea of Galilee in a storm, with waves over six feet. John leaves out Peter and the storm stopping; his point is simple and profound: Jesus is Lord of all creation. “It is I” is how we translate *I am* — “I AM had arrived.” Now, like John the Baptist, the disciples had a testimony of who Jesus is.

“What sign will you give?”

► 1:17:20

The crowd’s leaders followed by boat to Capernaum, and the next forty-six verses happen in the synagogue there. “By sheer length, John is saying pay attention.” Jesus, who knows what is in people’s minds, answered their real question: “You are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life.”

► 1:18:41

They asked what works God requires. “The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.” Belief, Frank said, is far more than interest or intellectual assent; it is accepting who Jesus is.

► 1:20:02

Then: what sign will you give us? Our ancestors ate manna. “It sounds to me like a union negotiating with a politician. You want our vote? What are you going to give us?” Meet our needs, answer our prayers, then maybe we will follow. Frank has met many who say they would believe if they saw a miracle — and many who have had answered prayers and still refuse to surrender.

► 1:21:21

“Then Jesus declared, ‘I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe. All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away.’”

JOHN 6:35–40 ↗ (NIV)

With this, Jesus stepped far beyond acceptable limits. Like the crowd at the mountain, they wanted to stay at a distance; they enjoyed the message and the displays of power, “but they weren’t willing to commit.”

“Isn’t this Joseph’s son?”

► 1:23:21

Told it was all God’s initiative, the leaders grumbled: we know his father and mother; how can he say he came down from heaven?

► 1:23:56

Before we blow that off, imagine Matt suddenly announcing he was the Son of God. Frank works with addicts every day, and men whose minds methamphetamine has damaged have shyly told him that; “it breaks my heart.” These people had grown up with Jesus.

► 1:24:36

So Jesus said, “Stop grumbling among yourselves. No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them.” “The witness of the Holy Spirit is the only way that we can believe.”

Our biggest weapon

► 1:26:06

Frank speaks at least two mornings a week to men who have never heard of Job, Jonah or Moses. “There’s been a concerted effort to remove the Bible from our culture, and we’re reaping the whirlwind.” So he gives them his testimony — [Revelation 12:11](#) says that is our biggest weapon: “not our ideas, not our impression; it’s what we know God has done in our lives.”

► 1:26:58

Often they do not believe Scripture or miracles — until the Holy Spirit begins moving. Men cycle in and out of rehab, and some survive and return. “I have seen the Holy Spirit at work. I’ve seen the mocking change. I’ve witnessed miracles as unbelievers come to faith and surrender themselves to Jesus.”

Flesh and blood

► 1:28:09

“I am the living bread that came down from heaven... This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.” Remember verse 4: Passover was near. Jesus was saying that he would take the place of the sacrificial lamb — “horrifying to these Jews,” except those in whom the Spirit was bearing witness. The argument broke out because some were receptive and others were not.

► 1:29:20

“Very truly” translates *amen, amen* — pay attention. “Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.” ([John 6:53–58](#))

► 1:30:26

“Jesus is not endorsing cannibalism. He is saying that those who receive his sacrifice on the cross for them will live forever.” It is God’s only plan to deal with our sin. Many disciples called it a hard teaching, and from that time many turned back and no longer followed him.

“To whom shall we go?”

► 1:31:41

Those who left had their own idea of who they wanted Jesus to be. “It’s like so many in the church today who come to try out Jesus, see if it works.” Many think he is at our beck and call. We want change in our country, and we should pray for it — “but God always wants to start with us, with our sin, because he came to set us free.”

► 1:33:15

Only now did Jesus speak to the Twelve, whom the lake had prepared: “You do not want to leave too, do you?” And Peter: “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God” (John 6:66–69). You can witness miracles, Frank said, but unless the Spirit works in you, “that does not become a testimony, because you only tell what you saw and not who did it.”

► 1:33:56

There is no plan B — not elaborate rules, not just declaring what you believe. Many of the men Frank speaks to say they have their own idea. “But this is not made up. God revealed this in his word, and reveals it every day to our hearts through the Holy Spirit.”

Out of the crowd

► 1:34:32

This is not Jesus having delusions of grandeur; it is almighty God coming to us through his Son “because we stubbornly stayed at a distance.” The Spirit is calling us out of the crowd, drawing those the Father has given to Jesus. As Lisette said, he loves us and wants us to walk with him.

► 1:35:07

“There’s a difference between belief and conversion, or a surrender.” If the Spirit has been wooing you, now is the time: kneel before him and surrender, and he will receive you and fill you with the Spirit so that you too may bear witness to what God has done and is still doing.

► 1:35:46

“When we stand in that darkness, you better have a testimony. We better all have a testimony. Can I get one? You bet you can.”

He closed in prayer to the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world: draw us, overcome our doubts, convince us of who you are, “replace any lesser gods that we’ve run after, feed us on what gives real life.”

FOR FURTHER STUDY**SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE**

- Psalm 19:14
- Isaiah 60:1–3 (NIV)
- Isaiah 5:20
- John 6:1–69
- John 1:19–36 (NIV)
- Zechariah 9:9
- Isaiah 53:6
- Zechariah 12:10
- Isaiah 9:2–7
- Deuteronomy 18:15–16
- Exodus 19:9
- Exodus 20:18–21 (NIV)
- John 6:35–40 (NIV)
- Revelation 12:11
- John 6:53–58
- John 6:66–69

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. Frank said the Lord told him, “People need to know who I am, not who they imagined me to be.” What imagined version of Jesus are people around you drawn to — and which one are you tempted by?
2. At Horeb the people stayed at a distance and settled for information. Where in your faith are you content to hear about God secondhand?
3. The crowd negotiated: give us a sign, then we will follow. How do you see that bargaining in your own prayers?
4. What is the difference between believing things about Jesus and surrendering to him, and how have you experienced it?
5. What is your testimony of what God has done in your life, and who will you share it with this week?

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Frank Costenbader is chairman of Hope Chapel's board. In his daily work with addicts and alcoholics, many of them in and out of rehab, he speaks at least two mornings a week and shares his testimony and the plan of salvation up to five times a day. He has been on the Sea of Galilee in a storm, and has been studying the Jewish tradition of two Messiahs for several years.

Watch the full message:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OIA6ZcCQLQc&t=3375s>

These notes summarise a message preached at Hope Chapel in Austin, Texas. They are a reader's aid, not a transcript — scripture references link to the full passage so you can read it in context.