

Meticulous obedience

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[0 : 00] I want you to imagine, and I say imagine not because I don't think this is happening, but I want you to try and place yourself in this position.

I want you to imagine God surveying Scotland. We read there in chapter 6 how he saw where Noah was living, and he saw the land, and he made an assessment of what he saw, and there was a reaction in God to what he saw.

And I'm sure the same God who did that on that occasion today is doing the same. He is surveying the world that he has made. He is surveying our country. And imagine God surveying Scotland. What will he see? What response will there be in God, in the heart of God as he surveys our communities, as he surveys our nation, as he looks on those he has made in his image with an intimate care and a beauty, and he looks and he sees so many whose lives have been destroyed by their own sin, by the sins of others.

He sees so many suffering, so many living lives that have no purpose, no goal, no reference to God, no reference to his work.

[1 : 18] He sees so many young children slaughtered before they see the light of day. He goes from home to home, and he can't find a Bible being read.

He can't see any interest in the word that he has given for our good. He looks down on a day such as this, and he sees the crowds flock into Time Castle, or whatever it is they're going.

But others who can't get in, they're going into the pubs and quads to watch on Skye, and he sees the churches, and he sees a trickle. What does he think as he looks on this scenario?

Does he not, as he did on this occasion, does he not look, and is he not grave in his heart? But I wonder if that's the end of the story, or does God, as he looked down, does he find a home?

Does he find an individual where he's able to say, but? Are you one who gives God reason to say, but? Ah, but here I find one who pleases me.

[2 : 25] Here is a home. Here is a community. Here is a congregation. Here is a family where it's different. Here is one who is concerned to live as I have instructed.

He is concerned with pleasing me. He is concerned to do as I command. Does he find such as he looks over our land, as he looks over our communities, as he looks into our churches?

You see, when he did so here in Genesis, he found just one man who answered that description.

He found just one man that provided a sense of relief in the face of great despair.

One man who was a bit of light in a very dark, dark picture. And that man was Noah. He said, Noah, please God. God looked down, and he was able to say of Noah that Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.

And how did he do that? How was it that Noah was so different to everybody else? How was it that he was able to bring joy and satisfaction to God himself?

[3 : 44] And what I want to do is try to answer that question, and I hope that all of us who are Christians, indeed all of us, whether we are Christians or not, but particularly if you're a Christian, that you would be intimately concerned as to the answer to that question.

How to please God? How to live a life that will have God look down on you and say, Ah, yes, here is one who pleases me. Here is one who is different.

Here is one who is prepared to swim against the tide. Here is one who is prepared to stand out for me. How did Noah do that? I want to say three things about Noah, as we find here in this chapter.

The first thing you can say is that he was different. Just that, he was different. And as we look at these in turn, I'll explain myself further, but for the moment simply make the point, he was different.

Secondly, he was in step with God. He walked with God. He was in step with God. And thirdly, he loved God. He loved God.

[4 : 53] And again, we'll look at how we come to these conclusions as we go through them each in turn. First of all, Noah was different. There in verse 9, we read, These are the generations of Noah.

Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations. And Noah walked with God. Particularly this phrase to begin with, He was just and perfect in his generations.

What's being said there? Well, really what's being said in more simple English or more modern English is simply to say that he was perfect and just among the people of his time.

When you compare Noah to his contemporaries, this could be said of him in a very specific effort as he made here to contrast Noah with those who were round about.

Noah is not being described in isolation. Very definitely and very particularly the point is being made that he was different. He was different from those round about him.

[5 : 59] He didn't just blend in with the crowd. He wasn't just a little bit better or a little bit less worse. He was just and perfect in his generations among the people of his time.

Now before we think a little bit more about this matter of being different, we can maybe just notice more briefly the actual words that are used to describe Noah. A just man and perfect.

He was just. He was righteous. He was one who deliberately and consciously sought to avoid that which was wrong, that which was sinful. But he didn't just do that.

He wasn't just content with avoiding what was wrong, but as a righteous man he was one who actively sought to do that which was good. When the Bible speaks of somebody who is righteous, it's not just a negative thing.

It's not just saying, oh, he didn't do all these bad things. It's saying a righteous man, a righteous woman avoids what is wrong, certainly, but then positively seeks to do that which is good. This was true of Noah.

[7 : 03] Noah could be described in this way, a righteous, a just man. But it goes on and says, and perfect. Or it could be translated, and blameless. Now we know from the whole teaching of Scripture that this cannot be speaking of some kind of sinless perfection and as we make Noah further on we find that that certainly wasn't true of him.

But certainly what is being said here is maybe an intensifying of the first description. He was a just man and blameless. He stood out even among those who could be described as righteous.

Nobody could point the finger at Noah. Nobody could say, ah, yes, he seems a very good man, ah, yes, but we know about this skeleton in his cupboard. We know about this blind spot.

He was blameless. He was a righteous man and one who had reached a level of righteousness, you might say, that was very much out of the ordinary.

And he was this in reference to God and to God's law. You see, Noah's life was not determined by the prevailing norms of his day.

[8 : 18] His righteousness righteousness wasn't a function of what public opinion was as to what was good, what was right, or what was wrong. He wasn't content to look around him and say, well, I consider myself a godly man, I consider myself a righteous man, and so I will see how others live, and I will make sure that I'm not as bad as they are.

Well, I will see the good things that others do, and I'll try to be a little bit better. The picture given is of one who is, in a sense, unconcerned about how others live, how good they are, how bad they are.

His only concern, his sole concern, is with reference to God and to God's law. And so in that sense, he is radically different from those around about him.

And he was different from all his contemporaries. Now, when we think of the contemporaries of Noah, and perhaps for some reason we think, well, it was, was it not, an exceedingly wicked age in which he lived.

Is that not what we were told? And yes, that's true. But isn't it reasonable to think that even among those who lived around about him, there were different categories, different degrees in terms of the scandalous or less scandalous lives that they lived.

[9 : 36] There would have been those who were overtly wicked, who sought out opportunities to shed blood and to oppress and to woe in their sin and in their rebellion.

But I'm sure there were others who lived seemingly respectable lives who didn't go out of their way to be difficult or to be nasty or to be violent.

They did their own thing. They lived their own lives, it's true, without reference to God, but not that desperately wicked as we would maybe judge it.

And remember that there would have been also among his contemporaries, among those whom Noah was so very different from, his own relatives.

Now we know that there was his wife and his three sons and their wives who all adjoined with him in the ark. But I'm thinking of other relatives. When you look at the figures given for his grandfather and his father, it's reasonable to see that his grandfather, Methuzalah, would have been alive right up until the time of the flood.

[10 : 45] His father, Lamech, would have died presumably while the ark was being built. And there would have been countless uncles and cousins and nephews and we're told that all of these were different from Noah.

Or rather, Noah was different from all of them. Easy for Noah to have said, well, as long as I'm as good as Lamech, my father, as long as I'm not that much worse than my uncles and my cousins, surely that will please God.

But Noah said, no. They are not the measure of the life I should live. I'm not going to be content with living a life that my father lived or that my grandfather lived.

I have to live in reference to God and in reference to his word. And if that makes me radically different to everybody else, well, so be it. If that means that others will look on and say, who does he think he is?

Well, so be it. Noah was different. He was a just perfect man in his generations among those in whom he lived. Now, is that true of you and of me?

[11 : 48] Are we not rather so often guilty of determining the kind of lives we live and the kind of moral standards that we have and our response and our attitude to God's law by the prevailing opinion?

And I speak of not just the prevailing opinion in society but even in the church in which we find ourselves among our fellow Christians. And we look around and we say, well, what do they do? Well, as long as I'm not worse than them. What is their attitude to this law? Oh, well, as long as I'm more or less put in with their view then I'm all right. So, you know, I wasn't prepared with that kind or wasn't satisfied with that kind of attitude to God's law.

to maybe think of examples. To think of the attitude that we have to truth and to honesty. Maybe we have to fill in forms, forms for our tax returns or forms when we're unemployed and claiming benefit and all kinds of forms that we fill in and we say, well, I'm a Christian.

I would never put something that was outrageously untrue. I would never deliberately cheat on these things. Ah, yes, but I wouldn't go that far.

[13 : 03] But maybe just bending the truth a little. Maybe not telling the whole truth. Maybe just concealing one or two facts that, oh, they don't need to know who are they anyway to be prying into my life. And so, we say we're not as bad as people out there.

Oh, no, we have a different standard. But is it a standard that we determine in reference to people out there or do we turn with an open Bible and say, well, what would God have me do?

What would God have me say in this situation? Or when it comes to the whole area of how pure our lives and our thoughts and our conversation, God would say to us, I don't want to have any coarse joking among you.

And we say, oh, well, I would never speak the way people out in the world speak. I would never use the language they use. I would never laugh at the jokes they laugh at. But as long as they're not quite as bad as they are, as long as they're a little bit more respectable than theirs, well, that's okay. I'm still better than them. There's still a difference. And God says to us, no, you turn to my word and you say what I say. You obey me. Don't determine how you live by trying to be a little bit better or a little bit less bad than everybody else as you see it.

[14 : 18] You think of the Lord's Day. How do we spend today, this Lord's Day? How do you spend it in comparison to the way you spent it 10 years ago or 20 years ago?

Has your attitude changed? Would you do things now that you wouldn't have done then? Now, I'm not going to legislate from the pulpit on what you should or shouldn't do. But what I do ask you is, if you have changed, why have you changed?

Is it because, well, that's just the way it is now? Christians do things now that they didn't used to do. You see, that's not good enough. If you with an open Bible can say, ah, no, but I have turned to the Word of God and I have seen that certain of the traditions that were common in the past I don't feel bound by with a clear conscience.

Well, that's one thing. But if your attitude and your behavior is simply a function of the prevailing norm, of the prevailing myth, even of Christians, then Noah says to you, that's not good enough. You go to God's Word and you say what God's Word tells you about these matters. We've been hearing in the Sermon on the Mount about our attitude to money, our attitude to worry, our attitude to our enemies and all these things.

[15 : 31] Are we radically different than these things to those around about us? Noah was, in first instance, somebody who was very, very different to those around about him.

But what more can we say about Noah that explains why this man pleased God? Well, we're told that he was in step with God. In the same verse, verse 9, these are the generations of Noah. Noah was a just man and perfect in his generation and Noah walked with God. Noah walked with God. Now, you maybe remember when we were looking at Micah and we had this same phrase, to walk humbly with your God.

And on that occasion, we noticed how Enoch is described in the Bible as walking with God. And then when you turn to Hebrews, when Enoch is again described, we're told that Enoch pleased God.

As if these two terms, these two words are being used synonymously. To please God is to walk with God. To walk with God is to please God. So that gives us some inkling into what is being said concerning Noah.

[16 : 47] But we can go further. Simply looking at the type of picture that is being painted. Somebody who walks with God. Somebody who is in step with God. It paints a picture of somebody who is very much in touch with God.

Somebody who is sensitive to God's voice. Somebody who shares God's affections and shares God's hates. Somebody who shares God's attitude to what he sees round about him.

God looked down on Noah's day and we're told that he was filled with grief at what he saw. Well Noah as the one who walked with God would have shared in that grief. Would have shared in that sorrow.

Would have shared in that revulsion at what he saw round about him. He walked with God. He was in tune with God. He was in the same wavelength with God. And if we ask the question why did God choose Noah to build this ark?

Why did God go to Noah with these instructions? Well the simple answer is that nobody else was listening. You see only Noah was listening. You see God maybe could have proclaimed it to all and sundry but only Noah was walking with God.

[17 : 58] Only Noah was in tune. Only Noah could hear. Only Noah could understand. because he walked with God. Because he was in step with God.

And today God continues to look for listeners. He continues to look for those who will be part of what he wants to do. I wonder what great plans God has for our congregation.

I wonder what marvelous plans he has for our communities and for our nation. And I wonder if God with these great and wonderful plans looks around and says well who is listening?

Who can I tell about these things? Who can I involve in these plans that I have? And does he look around and say well nobody's listening? Or even those who are listening they're so far away that when I speak my voice is heard but it's all so fuzzy.

It's all so quiet because they're just so far away. We think of a military leader who's planning a great campaign and he needs above all else to have communication with his lieutenants and with his troops.

[19 : 08] You see he may have wonderful plans he may have a brilliant military mind but if when he turns to his right hand man and his right hand man isn't there then he's struggling. If he needs to communicate to his lieutenants this is what we have to do.

These are the plans that I have and nobody's listening then that great plan is left without being fulfilled. And you say to me ah yes but surely God surely God can do all things even without us. Well that's true but he has chosen he has decreed in his sovereign providence that it will not be that way. He has chosen to use the likes of us.

And so he looks around and he says who's listening? Who's listening to what I have to say? Who wants to hear about my great plans? Who wants to be part of my great purposes?

Noah pleased God because when he turned to speak Noah was there and he said here am I Lord I'm listening I'm listening to what you have to say you tell me and I'll do it.

[20 : 12] Noah was in step with God. I wonder how much we miss out of being raised by God in a wonderful and in a marvelous way.

We miss out because we're just too far away. We can't hear what he has to say and when we do hear something it's so fuzzy that we get into awe terrible and say well what was it that he said? And did he really mean that? Or maybe I should think about this a little because we don't hear clearly because we're not walking close with him. Noah pleased God because he was different. He pleased God because he was in step with him and he pleased God because he loved him. Noah loved God and we turn to our chapter and we say well where does it say that? Where does it say that Noah loved God? Well I would suggest that it says it loud and clear in verse 22. Later in verse 22 it says thus did Noah.

[21 : 11] You've had this whole description of what Noah was to do and we're told thus did Noah according to all that God commanded him so did he. When we think of the words of Jesus in John chapter 14 and verse 15 Jesus is speaking to his disciples and he says if you love me keep my commandments.

Jesus is saying to you and to me he says if you love me if you want to show the measure of your love you want to give evidence tangible evidence of how much you love me then you obey my commandments.

And we're told of Noah that he obeyed everything just as God commanded. We have in our versions here in verse 22 a very literal translation of what the original language is.

All that God commanded him so did he. We find a repetition of the verse and the purpose of that is to give emphasis as to the manner in which Noah obeyed and the idea that is being put across by this emphasis is that Noah did everything just as God commanded him.

Noah loved God. There is no greater evidence of the deep love that he had for his God than in these words. What kind of obedience did Noah have?

[22 : 48] Well we can say two or three things about Noah's obedience. obedience. I was trying to think of appropriate adjectives and was struggling somewhat but one that maybe underpins all that we might say is that Noah's obedience was a radical obedience.

You see what was asked of him was quite astonishing. He is. He's asked to build this huge ark in the middle of a desert and there seems to be no possible reason for it.

It's an astonishing commandment that he's given. It's a mind blowing thing. A huge project and Noah alone to do all this.

I don't think we can begin to understand just how astonishing the commandment is. If we were to try and maybe think of a modern day parallel it's as if God were to come to you and just to you and to say my friend what I want you to do is to build a space station.

You go to Mars and build a space station where people can live because I'm going to destroy the earth and I need this space station where our righteous remnant can find safety.

[24 : 02] What an astonishing thing. What possible means could you have to do that? You don't have the knowledge, you don't have the resources, you don't have the manpower, how could you possibly even contemplate such a project?

It just seems totally bizarre and loopy. Well thankfully we know from God's other promises concerning his future plans, you don't need to worry that he will ask you to do such a thing.

But I want you to just get an idea of just what an amazing thing God asked of Noah. Noah. And yet Noah doesn't say Lord, this is impossible, this is too much, you know, you can't really expect this of me, yes I love you, yes I want to obey you, but this is just going too far.

I can't do this. I don't know how to build an ark, I've never built an ark in my life. In fact, nobody's built an ark. I can't even go and speak to somebody about building arks, because nobody knows about building arks.

It's never been done. I can't do this. But Noah doesn't do that. Noah doesn't quibble. Noah obeys. I was speaking to John, he was wanting to help with the sermon, and he said, can I write a bit of the sermon?

[25 : 19] And I said, oh well, okay. So he said, what's that Bible? And he said, it's about Noah building the ark. He said, have you got any ideas? He said, well, you can say that Noah built the ark.

And I said, I've got that. He says, well, you can say that God told Noah to build the ark, and he did it straight away. And I thought, there's something in that.

He said, I think that's what happened. Noah got the instructions. Amazing as they were, incredible as they were, mind-blowing as they were, and he said, well, that's what God told me to do. And out he went to chop that first cypress tree, or that first gopher tree, and he started because God had told him. And as he started, so God blessed, and God provided the knowledge, and God provided the resources, and God provided all that was necessary.

How he did it, I don't know. We could spend months in heaven quizzing Noah on the details, and there are sure hundreds of amazing stories behind the building of this ark.

[26 : 21] But Noah went out and he started. And as he started in obedience, in radical obedience to God, God provided all that was necessary. And it took time, but the ark was built.

And surely there's a tremendous lesson for us as the people of God today. God would have us do great things for him, and we say, but we don't have the resources, and we don't have the skills, and we don't have the manpower. Let's be like, no, let's just start.

And as we start, and as we take that step of faith, so the Lord then responds. And he says, ah, they've started. They've shown that initiative, that response.

They've shown obedience. And then the Lord comes in and says, this is what you need. Here are the people, here are the funds, here are the skills. Noah started. And he started straight away. Here was radical obedience. There's even an example of this spiritual principle of going out in obedience, and then the Lord providing what is needful.

[27 : 22] We think of the task that Noah had of gathering in the animals to the ark again. How on earth was he going to go about this task of gathering together all these animals to board the ark?

And we see there in verse 19, that God says to him, of every living thing of all flesh, two of every sort shall thou bring into the ark to keep them alive with thee. They shall be male and female. What did Noah have to do? He had to bring them in. He had to go and gather them in. And yet then we read on in verse 20, of fowls after their kind, and of cattle after their kind, of every creeping thing of the earth after its kind, two of every sort shall come unto thee to keep them alive.

I don't read too much into these birds, but they're the pictures of the animals actually coming to Noah. Noah had to go out and to start the task of bringing them in, and as he in obedience does that, so the Lord provides by means unknown to me for the animals to come to know.

And they come and they gather, the ark's ready, and in they go. A lesson for us as we consider what we might do for our God. Radical obedience. But what else can we say?

[28 : 36] Well, we can say that there was constant obedience on Noah's part. And this constant obedience predates the building of the ark. ark. You see, here was Noah, he was 500 years old when he's given this commission to build the ark.

And Noah had been faithful all throughout that period. A period, I'm sure, of lonely service. You see, it was a time when perhaps, and it's reasonable, I think, to suggest that when Noah was a young man, he was part of a larger believing community.

Because you only need to go up two or three generations previously and you find men like Enoch. And might it not be reasonable to suggest that when Noah was a young man, there were many who still feared God.

But what happens? The decades pass and the centuries pass and Noah sees these very people who may be looked up to, may be die off or drift away. And as the years go by, suddenly he finds himself alone.

And yet he remains constant. He remains faithful, even in the face of such tremendous discouragement, alone in the service of God. And he was constant, of course, not only before the ark, but in the building of the ark itself.

[29 : 52] We think of all that he might have had to face as he built this ark. The face of doubters. Again, maybe his own family, his uncles, his cousins, his nephews, and they would look on and say, Noah, what's going on?

What are you doing? Your religiosity, your fanaticism has gone too far. Noah. You've just become so religious that you can't see sense.

You're just going too far. This is fanaticism, Noah. Don't waste your life in this ridiculous enterprise. And maybe some would have said it even with a measure of concern for Noah, perhaps.

We don't know. And of course, there would have been others whose only concern would have been to mock and to laugh and to sneer. there's the weird Noah.

There's the crackpot Noah. There's the fool Noah. There's the laughingstock Noah. Look what he's on. Year after year building this ark. But Noah continued, constantly obeying God in the face of all this opposition, in the face even of the passing years.

[31 : 00] And maybe Noah himself began to think, well, what's going on? Year after year year after year. But he simply did what he was told. And as we would seek to be radical in our obedience to God, we too may find that we will be accused of being fanatical, of just taking things too far.

Maybe even within those who are part of the Christian community they'll look on and they'll say, well, that's just taking things too far. Who does he think he is? With these great plans, with these great dreams, with these great visions of service to God.

And it's very sad when you find that kind of doubt even among the Christian community, even among the believing community. I remember I had a friend who wanted to be a missionary and he had a very good job, a very well-paid job, but a very responsible job.

And yet he felt that God was calling him to the mission field. And you know the ones who most stood in his way? They were Christians. They said, what do you want to do that before? You can serve God where you are.

You can be a witness to God where you are. You don't want to go all the way over there. Your skills won't be utilized to the full over there. And Christians stood in his way. Christians said, well, that's taking things too far.

[32 : 18] I thought it was a tragic thing. That was a desperate thing that he should have to face that kind of opposition from those who should have been behind him and supporting him. So maybe even doubts from within, but certainly doubts from without, certainly rejection from without as you seek to do great things for God.

As you seek to proclaim the whole truth, you see Noah's whole enterprise was a great visual aid, a great sermon. We're told that he did preach to his generation also. And he did so with words and he did so with the ark that he was building.

And the message wasn't a palatable one. The message was this. This is an evil world and God is going to destroy it and that's why I'm building the ark. It wasn't a very nice message, but Noah preached it.

And of course, it didn't go down well with people who were self-righteous. It didn't go down well with people who had not a care for God, who had no desire to obey God. But Noah preached it.

Noah did what he was told. Great constancy. And then finally, his obedience was a meticulous obedience. And focusing in on that verse 22 that we were ennoting a moment ago, Noah did everything just as God commanded him.

[33 : 33] You can picture the scene. He's got to build this ark. It's got to be a gopher wood. Well, we don't know the geography. We don't know all that was round about where he was building that ark.

But we speculate. And he would go out and he would chop down these trees and maybe he chopped down all the gopher trees that there were around the building site. And maybe one of his sons would say, oh, Dad, can't we just use some of this other wood?

Do we really have to carry on and find gopher wood and go further and further? Let's just use these other trees. They're just as good. And Noah would say, no, son. God has said it's gopher wood and gopher wood it will be.

And he's building the ark and it gets bigger and bigger and bigger. It has to be 300 cubits. Maybe one of his sons says, Dad, does it have to be 300 cubits? Surely 250 would do, 280 would do.

And Noah says, no, son, it's got to be 300. God has said 300 and 300 it will be. He was meticulous. He did everything just as God has commanded him. He has to gather all these animals and another son says to him, but Dad, there will be room for all these animals.

[34 : 35] Does it have to be seven of this type and seven of that type? Won't five do? And Noah says, no, son, it's got to be seven because God has said seven. And he was meticulous in his obedience.

But Noah was alive today. And I just want to give one example. I wonder how that meticulous obedience would affect his view of how we as a people of God have obeyed and continue to obey the Great Commission.

Here we have the command of Jesus, go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature and every nation, make disciples, teaching them everything as I have commanded you. You see,

Noah would look at that and he would say, every nation.

He was a meticulous man. He would say, now what does that mean? Ah, it means every people, every tribe and he would say, have we done that? And he would say, how long have you had? Oh, a couple of thousand years. And he would say, what?

Two thousand years? You still haven't obeyed? He was meticulous. And he would say, and how do you go about this task? Do you make disciples? Are you content with simply proclaiming the gospel and then leaving them to see how best they can survive?

[35 : 44] God has said that you should make disciples, that you should teach, that you should instruct, that you should build up. Have you done that? You see, he was meticulous. He needed everything to be done just as God had commanded him.

Wasn't content with shoddy service. Wasn't content with doing as best he could. What about us? Do we have that passion? Do we have that burden to do everything just as God has commanded us?

Well, maybe we could go back to where we began. We thought of God surveying Scotland and wondering whether there were times when God could stop in his surveillance of Scotland and say, ah yes, here is somebody who's different.

Here is somebody who obeys me just as I have commanded. Would he find me under that description? Would he find you under that description? Or would he have to continue looking until he could find one who fits that kind of description?

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for Noah. We thank you that this man has so much to teach us. We thank you that it is so much more than a nice story for children.

[37 : 00] Indeed, Lord, we know that if it's anything, it's certainly not that. It's a dreadful story, a terrible story of sin and of corruption and of God's attitude to sin.

And yet, Lord, we thank you that in the midst of such evil and of such wickedness there was found this man, one who found favor in your sight. And, Lord, we pray that we would be as such.

Lord, we know that... You're not saying BS easily to hang out for you. We're not saying that we are looking for you and I don't say anything wrong... What am I doing to the thought of you?reads us.

Are you drinking Stuff Those Shouldn'tenders, Know your man to explore the subject 42 because you should sit down...

policymakers significance