



2024 Weekly Devotions

Week of: February 19th - 25th

Sermon: February 18th



February 19

Matthew 28:20

Today I have chosen to utilize the well-known 20th verse of Matthew 28, best known as a portion of the great commission. In this particular verse it says, "Teaching them to observe all that I have commanded..." I want to emphasize today the need to adhere to and obey all that God commands us. It isn't enough to decide that you are going to obey a little bit here and there when it is convenient or not to bothersome to your otherwise commitment to doing whatever you want. Jesus did not tell His disciples then, or today, that we could pick and choose when and what we will obey or that He would be appeased with partial obedience. Everything that our Master taught us is important and necessary for godliness.

We get a fantastic illustration of how this can work in a practical way. In our text from the sermon on Sunday, Genesis 6:15 says, "This is how you are to make it." Now, we of course know that this is where God was telling Noah how to build the ark. Friends, can you imagine getting this message from God? Noah had lived 500+ years on the earth doing what he did to make a living and lead a family. Now, he is told to build an enormous boat that is 3 stories high. Fortunately, when God told him to build it, He told him how to build it. I hope you will find confidence in knowing that whenever God calls you to a task, He will equip you to accomplish that task.

Let's consider for a moment what was at stake in Noah's complete adherence to God's instructions. Do you think that it would matter that He "obey all" that God commanded Him in this endeavor? Remember it is highly unlikely that Noah had ever built a boat before this point, much less one of this size. I believe it is safe to say that the task given to him was far beyond all human power to do it. Folks, I am sure that we all know how easy and natural it is for us to invent pretexts (excuses) for disobedience to God. I have often heard people dance around obedience, rationalize disobedience, and convince themselves that God is going to honor their faithlessness and unwillingness to trust Him because in their minds they simply no longer want to deal with the struggles of obedience and faith. Praise God that Noah did not do this.

Noah honored God by committing himself wholeheartedly to the task that was before Him. Moses wrote in Deuteronomy 6:5 that we are to love God with our whole heart, soul, and strength. Jesus said, "If you love Me, keep my Commandments" (John 14:15). This means that we are to be all in when it comes to trusting Him, taking Him at His word, and obeying. I believe that we can make a good point today with this example of the need for strict obedience to all of God's commandments. Think for a moment what would have happened if Noah decided to disregard portions of God's teaching on how to construct the ark. What if Noah had decided to leave some of the steps out? What if He had determined certain aspects of the construction were not necessary. Maybe he would have thought that he could save time by leaving some tar and pitch out or not fitting some timbers together exactly the way that God instructed him to.

I assume that we can all see that what I am saying today is that if Noah, who didn't know how to build an ark when he started, didn't obey all that God told Him, the ark would have sunk in the tremendous storm that befell the world. What about in your life? Many people end up shipwrecked because they fail to obey all that God commands and rather decide to pick and choose when and where they obey. To think that you can leave out portions of God's instructions for life and godliness is a recipe and guarantee that your ship is going under.

February 20

Colossians 1:5; 2 Peter 1:4

Today, I want to continue with the consideration of total obedience to the Word of God in light of the obstacles to it. It is one thing for me to write to you with a “just do it” attitude, but it is another thing to encourage you to obey with eyes wide open to the very real and present pressures that make this admonition terribly hard to follow sometimes. In other words, I don’t want you to think I have my head stuck in the sand or that I am unaware of how hard this can be. Friends, it isn’t always easy to stand faithfully and obediently when the world and the people in it are so contrary. We all know that it is a lot easier sometimes to just go with the crowd, not rock the boat, or just keep your mouth shut in the background. Fortunately, that is not what Noah chose to do.

Today, we will put ourselves in Noah’s world and let our sanctified imaginations help us feel the pressure *not* to obey God, and hopefully better understand how we still can be faithful in this perverse and crooked world. The apostle Paul commended the Christians in Colossae for their love and faith and declared that it was a result of their “hope in the Word of God and the gospel” (Col. 1:5). You see, their faith in Jesus Christ, their love for others, and their obedience stemmed from a confidence in the Word of God that created a genuine hope in their hearts. Peter wrote in his 2nd letter, “...by which He has granted to us His precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desires” (2 Peter 1:4). The point is that faith in His Word, His promises, His grace, etc. become the fuel that ignites our passion and willingness to obey in hard places. Let us take a look at some of the “hard places” that Noah likely faced.

I want you to see that on more than one occasion it is written that “Noah did all that God commanded” (6:22; 7:5). Why? Because He trusted in the promises of God. God told Noah that He would establish His covenant with him (6:18). Noah knew that if he trusted God, he and his family would be safe. The passage in Hebrews is helpful for us as it says, “By faith, Noah being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household” (Hebrews 11:7). Let’s think about some of the circumstances that made obedience hard for Noah at this point in his life and please apply them to your own situations. Trust Him at all times in all situations – completely!

The size of the task was overwhelming. How would he do it? Where would he get all of the materials? What about the need to keep on providing for his family in light of having to spend so much time building the ark? This task was going to take so long. Surely, he reflected on the challenges that would appear to make this job too much. Then there were the neighbors and the community in which he lived. Remember the world was already spiraling deeper into sin and evil. The mocking would have been hard enough, but I suppose that there were real attempts to stop him. One must assume that God protected Noah and his family and literally kept the antagonistic crowd at bay. Still the reproaches and threats were likely real and difficult.

Noah probably scratched his head more than once wondering how in the world he would corral animals of all “kinds” on the ark when the time came. There again, it must have been pure faith in the promises of God that kept him going and satisfied that God would make a way. I want you to see just how heroic, courageous, and amazing was his faith to carry out this monumental task by the power of God working through Him. He is the same God today dear ones so trust Him.

February 21

Genesis 1:21; 6:20

One of the questions that often plague the mind is, "How in the world did Noah fit two and in some cases seven of every kind of animal on the ark. If you have ever had the pleasure and great opportunity to see the, to scale, replica of the ark at the Creation Museum in Kentucky, you will better understand just how enormous the ark was. I can tell you that it was huge, and it had three levels for the people and animals to live. Even so, it would still be hard to imagine every species on the planet getting aboard.

Today we will consider one possible answer to the conundrum that makes sense to me, and I hope to you as well. Either way, I am personally satisfied in my own heart and mind that God accomplished the task just as He willed. I have no doubt that every being that God wanted spared through the flood was indeed kept alive for future procreation and some for sacrifice once they could get off the ark. The question was addressed at a lecture that Johanna and I attended when we had the privilege of going to the Creation Museum ourselves. I will try to recall what I can for today's point to ponder to provide a possible answer to our question.

Instead of using the word *species*, the Bible uses the word *kind* in Genesis 1:21 where it is recorded that God created plants and animals "according to their kind." Then in Genesis 6:20 we see the word *kind* used again when God tells Noah to bring the land-dwelling animals of every *kind* onto the ark. A simple rule of thumb is that if two animals can successfully breed, they are of the same kind. So, you will never see a dog successfully breed with a cat or a cow with a horse; However, you can see a zebra and a donkey. As a matter of fact, at the Creation Museum's petting zoo, they have an animal they call a zonkey. It is the offspring of a zebra and a donkey and a 'zorse' which is, you guessed it, the result of a zebra and a horse. What you will never see is a 'dat' – the result of a dog and a cat because they are not of the same *kind*.

How does this provide a possible answer to the question? It is completely possible that all of the animals that you and I see running around on the planet today were either not in existence or not all of them were necessary to bring on to the ark to keep that *kind* of animal alive. For example, the dog *kind* would include every species of dog that we know of, including coyotes, wolves, dingoes, etc. The same thing would be true regarding chickens for example. What we can surmise is that every kind of animal on the planet today had at least two ancestors on the ark. God placed variety within the original kinds and so now we have amazing and varying breeds within the original *kinds*.

The fact that the word *species*, which is not the word found in Genesis, took the place of the word *kind* created grave problems for the church. Whereas Christians were talking about "fixity of species" back in Darwin's day, they should have been using the phrase "fixity of kinds." Darwin got a leg up when people realized that species do change and so his faulty theory of evolution began to gain ground. The mistake the church made was allowing the naysayers to change the definition of the word *kind* to *species*. We would argue today that *kinds* have variation, but you will never see a dog change into a cat. Kinds are fixed within the limits that God set. Remember that Darwin's book was entitled "Origin of the Species" in which he made variation within kinds look like evolution as it is taught today. Words and definitions matter dear ones, but rest assured that God had no trouble getting the animals on the ark and I think this explanation is at least plausible.

February 22

Genesis 6:18

We will most certainly write more points to ponder about covenants as they unfold in God's redemptive plan, but for today I want to introduce the concept of biblical covenants as one is mentioned in our text from Sunday. Although the word covenant was not used in Genesis 1-3 in the relationship between God and Adam, scholars realize that God's mandate on Adam and Eve to be faithful and obedient to Him, take care of the Garden of Eden, and be fruitful and multiply surely was understood in the structure of a covenant relationship.

When we come to the first mention of covenant in the Bible, Genesis 6:18, I am reminded of what G. K. Beale wrote in his book *A New Testament Biblical Theology*. He said, "The evidence broadly supports the notion that everything in the biblical canon should be seen to have its roots in Gen. 1-3 and to move toward its final goal in Rev. 21." He stated that the Old Testament is filled with cyclical patterns supporting the belief that there were "inaugurated new-creational movements of God's kingdom following crisis points of chaos." I know that sounds like a lot but all he is saying is that when the world experienced chaos like it did just prior to the flood, judgment came, but then a renewed and refocused movement towards continuing with His plan from Genesis 1-2. He put it this way which I think sums it up nicely, *"The Old Testament is the story of God, who progressively reestablishes his new-creational kingdom out of chaos over a sinful people by the word and Spirit through promise, covenant, and redemption resulting in worldwide commission to advance this kingdom and judgment."*

What I am getting at today is that when you read the fact that God is establishing a covenant with Noah, I want you to see it as a progression of the original plan restated and recommissioned to the next man of God to carry out the Great Commission. You will see its progression again when he establishes the next portion of the covenant with Abraham. You will find similarities with progression towards the ultimate new covenant. The covenant that God mentions here with Noah is spelled out in more detail in Genesis 9 once Noah steps off the ark.

Before we go any further in this point to ponder, I want you to consider how vital it was that Noah have a "word" from God regarding His faithfulness to Noah. The task that God was calling Noah to was astronomical in size and, as I wrote a couple of days ago, was surely a source of persecution, ridicule, and opposition. When the wind blows hard against you and obedience doesn't seem to be making sense, you need a confident assurance from God that you are doing right and that He is in it with you. The promise of the covenant in Genesis 6:18 was that assurance for Noah. You see, we know, and I assume that Noah had learned this too over 600 years, that God cannot lie (Hebrews 6:18). Let us end today's devotion with inspiration and application.

When I think of the covenant that God was making with Noah in this portion of our text, I see the parallels with the new covenant that was made with us by Jesus Christ. We refer to the new covenant as the "covenant of grace," which was ratified by the shed blood of Christ upon the cross. His covenants were always ratified with the sacrifice of animals and their shed blood. At the very heart of this covenant is God's promise of redemption. God has promised to redeem all who put their trust in Jesus as Lord and sealed it with a promise and a holy vow just like He did with Noah and Abraham. God pledged Himself to our full redemption and we can trust Him to be true to His promise and covenant.

February 23

Hebrews 12:14

It is often said that God loves us unconditionally. I have always found that statement to be a bit naïve and dangerous. Many times, it seems to be a free pass for unholy lifestyles and excuses for sin. While it is true that we do not earn God's love and He does not love us more or less by our performance, it is also true that there are firm expectations as to how His children are to live in this world. I would say that His love is only unconditional when we have bowed the knee to the Lordship of His Son Jesus Christ, who then becomes our Savior. In other words, when we have committed to follow Jesus and walk as He walked, we are adopted into the family of God, and then God certainly loves us always and will never remove His love from us. That does not mean there will be no discipline for sin in the lives of even His children, and especially His children. Now, back to covenants.

God's relationships with His people are structured around covenant. Many tend to think of covenants as contracts and there certainly are some similarities. Contracts are typically binding agreements made between two parties who are often in equal positions. A covenant is an agreement however, in the Bible, in which two parties are not of equal standing. Biblical covenants usually involved a king and his subjects. There were never any negotiations between the two. The structure of the covenants is typically: First, there is the preamble which would name the parties involved. In the Bible, it would go like this, "I am the Lord your God." He is the king, and we are the subjects. The next element is called the historical prologue. It is the section of the covenant that would detail why the King should be honored with servitude and obedience. An example would be when God says, "I led you out of Egypt with a strong and mighty hand." The reason their adoration and honor is warranted is because of His grace and mercy towards them in His actions.

The next section would detail His expectations of those whom He rules. The Ten Commandments are a good example of this section of the covenant. The King would tell the subjects His expectations as to how they were to live in His kingdom. So, you see, the biblical pattern of covenants does not contain a shred of evidence that our relationship to God is one with no expectations or consequences for disobeying Him and breaking the covenant on our part. The final part of the covenant would list the details of the blessings for obedience and the curses for disobedience. A great example of this is found in Deuteronomy 28 where we are told that obedience would bring His blessings and favor while disobedience would bring curses upon the people. I know I am writing from an Old Testament period but please know that our call to holiness is not less emphatic but more in the New Testament.

This pattern is evident in God's covenants with Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and even the covenant between Jesus and His church. In Biblical times, covenants were ratified in blood as I stated yesterday. It was normal for both parties to pass through cut up animals signifying their agreement with the terms of the covenant (Gen. 15; Jer. 34:18). You might recall that in the covenant with Abraham, only God passed through the sacrificial animals indicating that the keeping of the covenant was going to be wholly dependent upon His faithfulness and not Abraham's. We can praise the Lord today that Jesus Christ shed His blood to ratify the new covenant with His bride and sealed us with His Spirit.

February 24

Genesis 7:16; Matthew 25:10-13

Decades had passed since God told Abraham to build the ark. Some say as many as 100 years, but I do not believe you can necessarily make that assertion based on the Scriptures. We cannot know exactly when Noah began to build the ark after his 500th birthday. We also know that if Genesis 6:3 is referring to 120 years before God would bring the flood waters upon the earth, we still can't know when Noah began construction. It is a fair estimate to say he worked on it for decades. Now, that is not actually the point to ponder today.

As we wrap up another week of points to ponder, I want you to see both the compassionate patience of our God as well as His commitment to final judgment. In our text from Sunday, we are told that Noah, his family, and all the animals boarded the ark as God instructed, and then we get the extremely powerful words, "And the Lord closed the door behind them" (Gen. 7:16). From a purely practical standpoint, it would have likely taken the strength of the Lord to do it as the door was massive in size. From a theological standpoint, it would also require the sovereignty and power of the Lord to close the door.

Friends, I have often thought of how hard it would have been for Noah to look out across his community, where he had lived for centuries, and close the door on his neighbors. Even though many had probably treated him poorly, being a righteous man of God, it is easy to imagine Noah as a man with compassion and pity towards them. He had preached with word and deed for more than one hundred years hoping that they would obey God, and now the "door" was closing. On the other side of that door there would soon be fear, panic, desperation, and heartache as husbands saw their wives washed away by torrents of rushing water and children swept into the abyss. Noah would know that this would be the end of humanity outside of the ark and I assume it would have been nearly impossible for a mere mortal to look upon his fellow man and shut that door. He didn't have to because that ability and right belongs only to our Sovereign God. He is Creator, Sustainer, and Judge.

Dear Ones, we must grasp the truth that another day is coming when God will decide that enough is enough. It will come, as it did in Noah's day, after centuries and even millenniums of patience and long-suffering by God. BUT, it will come nonetheless. Jesus emphasized this truth when He taught the parable of the virgins and the lamps (Matt. 25:10-13). The rather simple point of the parable is that when the bridegroom (Jesus) arrives, it will be too late to start getting prepared. The exhortation is that we be ready before He gets here. Verse 10 of Matthew 25 is reminiscent of Genesis 7:16. It says that those who were ready went into the marriage feast with Jesus, "and the door was shut." Those who were not ready for His return found themselves on the outside looking in banging on the door and shouting, "Let us in." At that point, it was too late just as it was when God closed the door on the ark and the rain began to fall.

Folks, I can imagine that the screams were piercing and gut wrenching as they realized their foolishness and rebellion against God had cost them life on earth and separation from God and the saints eternally. Please do not trifle with God and take for granted His patience and compassion. How sad it is to know that God had led a man to build a huge shelter from the impending flood, and mankind mocked Him and rejected it until it was too late. Even in judgment He made ONE way to be saved and they would have none of it. There still remains ONE WAY and His name is Jesus.

February 25

Romans 6:10 & 1 Peter 3:18

God gave Noah the ability to build the ark. God closed the door of the ark. God made it rain. God caused the “fountains of the great deep to burst forth” (Gen. 7:11). God caused the animals to heed Noah’s call to not only board the ark, but to come to it in the first place. God did many tasks that only He could in and through this historic event. However, as is usually the case when God involves mankind in His mission, Noah and his family had jobs to do as well.

Have you thought about the fact that God could have simply created the ark Himself from nothing like He did “in the beginning?” Obviously, He chose instead to involve Noah and His family in the process. Noah and his family had to cut down trees and prepare the lumber and so forth for the ark. They had to gather all the food that they would need for ten months while on the ark and make provisions to store it up (Gen. 6:21). It is subtle but important too that it is written, “And Noah and his sons and his wife and his sons’ wives with him...went into the ark to escape the waters of the flood” (Gen. 7:7). They had to make the decision to trust and obey; they had to get on board.

It is a simple point to ponder here at the outset of this devotion, but I want us to consider the fact that God is Sovereign and deserves praise and glory for His precious grace that is at work in us (Phil. 2:13; Titus 2:11-12) undoubtedly. However, He maintains the expectation that we are the means through which He will accomplish much of His will. In other words, He will make a way, but we may have to be busy building it. He may give us wisdom and knowledge, but we need to get busy reading, meditating, and applying His truths. He may meet our needs, but we need to go to work.

Now as we wrap up this week of “points to ponder,” please understand that the types and shadows of the Old Testament were meant to shed revelation, progressively, on the coming One who would accomplish redemption Himself. Jesus was a better Adam, Noah, Abraham, and David. He was the mediator of a better covenant. I say all of that simply to say that whereas Noah had to build the ark for the salvation of his family, Jesus is the ark for His. The analogies that we can draw between Jesus and many of the people of the Old Testament only work so far. To be clear, Noah had to build the ark in which to be saved from the flood waters of judgment, Jesus is our salvation from the judgment of God. We add nothing to what He is or what He has accomplished. The point of the ark is that God provided the means by which Noah and his family could escape His judgment by faith in His word and His way.

Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14:6). Isn’t it interesting that God didn’t even use a man to “build” Jesus as it related to His birth. God did not need a man to provide the “ark” that would save man. He utilized Mary simply as the means by which our Savior was to “put on flesh” (John 1:14). There are many tasks that God gives mankind the privilege of joining in with Him to accomplish. It is meant to be a means of great joy to co-labor with our Master in Kingdom assignments. At the same time, His perfect plan of redemption is perfect and complete without us. It was done for us and requires only that we, by faith, enter into His salvation and rest. Jesus is the ark that came to save us. All the while the flood waters rise and increase in our world today (Gen. 7:17-18), fear not dear ones, our Ark will float on the face of the waters that threaten to destroy (v. 18) and we will be safe even as those around us who reject Him perish. Someday this Door will close too. Don’t delay, trust Jesus as your Lord and Savior today and enjoy the ride.