

Title: The Difference That Matters September 27, 2026 (Liberty UMC)
Text: Genesis 6:5-8 Rev. Chan Kim

The story of Noah is told over four chapters, from Genesis 6 through Genesis 9. Genesis 6:22 introduces Noah in one simple sentence: **"Noah did everything just as God commanded him."** When God told Noah to build the ark, Noah obeyed completely. He did not do it halfway. He did not add his own ideas. He did not worry about what other people were doing. He did not calculate what he might gain or lose. Noah simply followed God's word. That is why Genesis 6:9 says: **"Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked faithfully with God."** Noah was righteous and blameless in his generation. He walked with God.

But what was the world like in Noah's time? Genesis 6:11–13 tells us: **"Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence."** The earth had become deeply corrupt. Violence had filled the world. Sin was everywhere. So God decided to judge the world. Yet in the middle of all this wickedness, Noah remained faithful. He was righteous and blameless. He walked with God.

Now let us look at Genesis 6:8. Shall we read it together? **“But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord.”** This verse speaks about God’s grace. How was Noah able to live differently in such a corrupt world? How could he obey God so completely? The answer is here: **“But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord.”**

It was God's grace. Noah's righteousness was not simply the result of his own passion, discipline, or effort. God's grace made Noah the Noah we meet in the Bible. Our spiritual discipline and good works can help us grow. But living a life that walks faithfully with God is possible because of God's grace. When God's grace fills our hearts, we can walk with God even in a corrupt world. I believe this is one of the most important messages in the story of Noah.

Among the Gospels, Matthew 24 gives us Jesus' clearest teaching about Noah and the flood. Let us look at Matthew 24:37–39. **"As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark. And they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away."**

Jesus connects Noah's flood with His coming again. Before the flood came, people

were living their ordinary lives. They were eating and drinking. They were marrying and giving in marriage. But Noah was doing something very different. He was obeying God and building the ark.

The ark was enormous. Noah worked on it for decades. There were no modern cranes or equipment. And he was not building it beside the sea. He was building it on dry land. People probably thought Noah was crazy. They may have mocked him or looked down on him. But Noah did not let their opinions change him. For decades, he quietly and faithfully followed God's command. Finally, the flood came, and the whole earth was covered with water.

Then Jesus goes one step further. Matthew 24:40–42 says: **"Two will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left. Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come."**

Two people are working in a field. One is taken, and the other is left. Two women are grinding grain. One is taken, and the other is left. Outwardly, there seems to be no obvious difference between them. They are doing the same ordinary things. Yet their destinies are completely different. Why? What makes the difference?

Let us go back to Genesis 7:17–20. Verse 17 says: **"For forty days the flood kept coming on the earth, and as the waters increased they lifted the ark high above the earth."** As the water rose, the ark floated higher and higher. Verse 19 says: **"They rose greatly on the earth, and all the high mountains under the entire heavens were covered."** Even the highest mountains were covered. Then verse 20 says: **"The waters rose and covered the mountains to a depth of fifteen cubits."** Fifteen cubits is about 22 feet. Think about that. The water covered the highest mountains and then rose another 22 feet.

Imagine some very good mountain climbers outside the ark. As the water rose, they climbed as high as they could. Perhaps they thought, "If I reach the highest point, I will be safe." Finally, they reached the summit. But the water reached the summit too. Then it rose another 22 feet. No matter how hard they tried, they could not escape the rising water.

Now think about Mount Everest. Mount Everest is about 29,000 feet high. Add another 22 feet, and it becomes 29,022 feet. Is 22 feet a big difference compared with 29,000 feet? From a distance, you could hardly see it. Think about a football

field. A football field, including the end zones, is 360 feet long. Twenty-two feet on a 360-foot field would be only about **0.73 inch**.

Less than one inch. That is almost impossible to notice. Yet in the story of Noah, those additional 22 feet made the difference between life and death. Sometimes a difference can look very small from the outside, yet have an enormous result.

I learned something about this through my pastoral ministry. At the church I served before coming to Liberty, there were many people in their nineties. One person was 102 years old. Another was 98 and still driving and even accompanying me on pastoral visits. For many of them, simply coming to church on Sunday was a big thing. Sometimes they came thinking, "This may be my last Sunday." So whenever I saw them, I tried to serve them with all my heart.

Sometimes I would see someone one Sunday, and the next Sunday they would not be there. When I called, I would learn that they were in hospice care. I would go to visit them, and sometimes they would receive my prayer and pass away that very night. Those experiences taught me again how precious one person is.

I was not always like this. In the past, my ambition and goals often came before love. I was thinking about big churches, impressive buildings, becoming a well-known preacher, writing a best-selling book, and other great ambitions. Then, for various reasons, we had to sell our church building, and people began to leave. I became deeply disappointed. During that time, I read the Bible a lot. One verse that stayed with me was Jeremiah 45:5: **"Should you then seek great things for yourself? Do not seek them."**

I must have been pursuing great things so intensely that God used this verse to wake me up. Even today, when I meet people from my former Korean church, I sometimes apologize. I tell them, "I did not understand back then. I was wrong. I am sorry." I had been looking at the big things and overlooking the small things.

But as I have served American congregations, I have learned again how precious one soul is. I have learned to pay attention to small things—to show compassion, to listen, to empathize, and to share in another person's pain. These things may look small. But they are precious to God. And I am trying to give my very best to them.

This brings us back to Jesus' words in Matthew 24. Two people are working in a field. One is taken, and the other is left. Two women are grinding grain. One is

taken, and the other is left. Jesus does not tell us what the outward difference is. They look like ordinary people. So, what makes the difference?

Jesus gives us another picture in the parable of the wheat and the weeds. At the final judgment, the wheat is gathered into the Lord's barn, while the weeds are thrown into the fire. What is the difference? The wheat bears fruit. Then what kind of fruit does God look for in our lives? **Love.** Jesus tells us that the greatest commandment is to love God and to love our neighbor as ourselves.

Love God. Love ourselves as God's beloved children. And love our neighbors. The difference that matters is not always something people can see on the outside. It is whether the fruit of love is growing in our lives.

Whenever I visit Korea, I use the subway a lot. I travel almost everywhere by subway. When I see people on the subway, I sometimes look at them and think, "Every one of these people is precious to God." Even among people sitting together on the same subway, one person may be taken and another left when the Lord comes. We do not know. So, we should not overlook anyone.

When I travel, I usually choose one book to read. This time, I read Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*. It is not an easy novel. This was my second time reading it. The main character, Prince Myshkin, sees people whom others might overlook. He treats them with love, compassion, empathy, and a willingness to listen. That reminded me of what I have been learning in my own ministry.

Beloved friends, let us love one another. Let us look beyond differences in appearance, values, political views, and other things that separate us. Jesus says: **"Love your neighbor as yourself."** Especially, let us pay attention to the people and the moments that seem small or insignificant.

The person sitting quietly beside us.
The person who feels forgotten.
The person who needs someone to listen.
The small act of kindness that nobody else notices.
These things may look small to us.
But they may be very precious to God.

The story of Noah reminds us that a small difference can have an enormous consequence.
And Jesus reminds us that we do not know when He will come again.

So let us not wait.

Let us walk with God today.

Let us receive God's grace today.

And let us bear the fruit of love today.

Love God. Love one another. And give your very best to the people God places around you.

I believe that when the Lord comes again, we will be ready to meet Him.

And I believe that God's grace will be at work in a life filled with love.