

THINGS THAT CEASE NOT

Genesis 8:20-22, 9:11-15

Revelation 4:2-3, 6 (from "And in")-8

Luke 7:36-38, 44-46

Acts 5:40-42

I wish to speak about things that Scripture says cease not. Firstly, of God's covenant with the creation, "Henceforth, all the days of the earth, seed time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night, shall not cease." Then, about the living creatures who "cease not day and night saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty." Thirdly, about a woman who, Jesus said, "has not ceased kissing my feet." And, finally, about the apostles who "ceased not teaching and announcing the glad tidings that Jesus was the Christ."

We live in a world of change. I read in a management book once that the only thing that was certain in this world was change. But with God we find things that are stable. It is tremendous to know that God's promises stand.

God's covenant

After Noah went out of the ark, God said that He would put His bow in the clouds. Have all the young people here seen a rainbow? It is lovely to see a rainbow! Next time you see a rainbow, think of God's promise – that He will not destroy the earth again with a flood: God keeps his promises.

God says "I set my bow in the clouds. ... When I bring clouds over the earth ... the bow shall be seen in the cloud, and *I will remember my covenant.*" God is ever mindful of His covenant. People might forget about creation; many do not believe in creation. Recently I gave a tract to someone who said 'I won't take it, I'm an evolutionist.' He wouldn't listen to the message about Jesus because he didn't believe in creation.

Despite man's indifference, hatred and lawlessness, God has kept things going in His creation. He is ever mindful of His covenant, His word to a thousand generations, Psalm 105:8.

Old Testament prophets refer to this covenant. When many of God's people were going into captivity, Jeremiah says 'If you can

break the covenant with the day and the night, then God's covenant will be broken with David my servant,' Jer 33:20-21. But we can't break that covenant. Indeed God's promise to Israel – to have a successor to David upon his throne – has taken place. Matthew 1 refers to Jesus as Son of David.

We are now in the time of the new covenant. The Lord Jesus Christ has worked out God's plan of salvation alone upon the cross. What marks the new covenant is forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. It's not a covenant of demand but of supply. And, just as God remembers the bow in the clouds, He remembers His new covenant based upon the work of Jesus.

Dear fellow believer, God's word stands despite how you are feeling. Maybe at times you feel great, and at other times you feel depressed, but if you have put your trust in a living Christ, repented of your sins, and accepted the work of Jesus – then your sins are forgiven, and that blessing remains for ever. When John writes his epistle, he says: "I write to you, children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake," 1 John 2:12.

Many Christians today are uncertain about the work of salvation, probably because they haven't had it very well explained. The Bible is very plain: "In Whom we [believers] have redemption ... the forgiveness of offences, according to the riches of His grace," Eph 1:7. God has cast all our sins behind His back because the Lord Jesus has borne them.

Just as God's covenant with the earth does not cease, what God has established through the death and resurrection of Jesus also remains and will remain for ever.

Living creatures

I now want to speak about these living creatures that cease not saying "Holy, holy, holy".

John, the apostle, was banished to Patmos for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. First of all, he sees Jesus in judicial clothes. When Jesus was here on earth, John was very close to Jesus: he leaned on His breast, John 21:20. He was frightened when he saw Him in these judicial garments. But then Jesus laid His right hand on him and said "Fear not; I am the first and the last, and the living one: and I became dead, and behold, I am living to the ages

of ages, and have the keys of death and of hades," Rev 1:17-18. How wonderful to belong to the One who is all-powerful! Governments come, governments go; sometimes they are against God's people; sometimes, as in this country, they allow considerable liberty. But Christ remains and He, unlike anyone else, has the keys of death and hades.

Next John gets the Lord's assessment of the seven assemblies, which had many unholy features. Then John is raised up to heaven and he sees a throne. He sees a rainbow – notice that! God will continue to be true to His covenant. We sang in our opening hymn [of the reading]

O Lord, Thy fair creation groans,
The air, the earth, the sea,
In unison with all our hearts,
And calls aloud for Thee.

(Hymn 93)

The whole creation is in bondage – there is suffering, there is death in it. When Jesus comes to reign things will change – God will be true to His covenant, even in relation to his dealings with the earth. The basis for all is laid in the death of Jesus. God smelt the sweet odour that rose from the death of Christ.

When John is invited to come up he sees God's throne in heaven. God's throne has never changed. In the midst of the throne and around the throne are these four living creatures. "They cease not day and night saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who was, and who is, and who is to come." It reminds us of Isaiah's experience when he saw seraphim who say, "Holy, holy, holy is Jehovah of hosts," Isa 6:3. The holiness of God isn't any different in New Testament times than in Old Testament times. God hates sin, God abhors sin. Yet it is marvellous that, in the death of Jesus, God has a righteous means to deliver people like you and like me from our sins, so that we might be secured as vessels of grace to praise God.

These four living creatures day and night say "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty." We should remember that God is a holy God; God hates sin so much that "Him who knew not sin He has made sin for us, that we might become God's righteousness in Him," 2 Cor 5:21.

The assembly is now the abode of God's holiness. In the Old Testament, the redeemed people who came out from Egypt crossed the Red Sea and sang a song of deliverance. This song of Moses includes the words: "Thou hast guided them by Thy strength unto the *abode of Thy holiness*," Ex 15:13. Despite the failure of the Christian profession, of which we all form a part, God's thought about the assembly is that it is the abode of His holiness.

The first reference in the Bible to the house of God emphasises holiness. In Genesis 28, when Jacob leaves home, He lies down at night with a stone for his pillow, and he dreams of a ladder that went into heaven with angels that went up and down it. He woke in the morning, and he says "How dreadful is this place! This is none other but the house of God." He was afraid! Why? God was there! The abode of God's holiness – that's what the assembly, the house of God is. And you and I need to remember that.

The attitude of these four living creatures, day and night saying "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty," should be reflected among the people of God. It should be seen in your life and mine, morning, noon and night. Once when doing wrong one evening I remembered this scripture. In Revelation, each of these four living creatures says *day and night* "Holy, holy, holy!". It is twenty-four hours each day – 24/7 to use the modern expression. God is a holy God, a sin-hating God. Let us Christians remember that in our lives, and seek the Lord's help to hold our bodies individually as temples of the Holy Spirit, 1 Cor 6:19.

Kissing His feet

I come to the third scripture, which came to mind recently during the Lord's supper, a special time when believers can receive impressions of Him and His love. There we should be freshly thrilled about the Lord, His death and rising again, and the wonderful blessings of God's purpose into which He would have us enter and enjoy for eternity. Even if we just get a touch of it, it is wonderful. Psalm 45:17 says "I will make Thy name to be remembered throughout all generations; therefore shall the peoples praise Thee for ever and ever." We are now many generations from the time of the apostles, but there are still people praising the name of the Saviour who has done so much for us.

Jesus said of the woman in Luke 7: "From the time I came in [she] has not ceased kissing My feet." Let's think about the setting here.

A Pharisee invites Jesus into his house, one of three instances in Luke's Gospel where Jesus ate in a Pharisee's house. Jesus accepted these invitations, and every time He went He made His presence felt. There are sometimes questions raised about where believers should go and shouldn't go. One of the best things I ever read in ministry about where believers should go was: 'I do not care to be where I ... am not free to speak of the things of God' (FER vol 1, p212).

This Pharisee didn't offer Him common courtesies of the day – he didn't give Him water to wash His feet, he didn't give Him refreshment, he was obviously very cold towards Him. But then this woman of bad reputation comes, uninvited, into his house. Luke states that she weeps, she washes His feet with tears, she wipes them with the hairs of her head and kisses His feet. We don't know how many kisses she put on His feet. The note says 'ardently kissed' or 'covered with kisses.' But what Jesus says is: "From the time I came in [she] has not ceased kissing My feet." The Lord Jesus appreciated what that woman did.

There is a lot of 'nominal Christianity' today. I don't want just to be a 'nominal Christian.' The Pharisee was like a nominal Christian. He begged Jesus to come in, wasn't that good? He provided a meal for Him, wasn't that good? But there was no heart for Jesus. Oh, to have a heart for Jesus! If He has taken away your sins, if you have forgiveness through Him, surely you have a heart for Jesus? I think every genuine believer in the Lord Jesus Christ has kissed His feet once. The question for me is, 'Am I still kissing His feet?'

Some of us have been Christians for many years. Are we still kissing the feet of the Saviour? Do we still appreciate these feet that brought Him from glory's height into this world of sin and suffering? Do we appreciate the love He expressed throughout His time here, serving people, enduring criticism, touching people that were outcasts of society that nobody else wanted? Do I still appreciate the feet of Jesus, that took Him to the cross in order to take away my sins and to be the Saviour of the world? It is a challenge when you have been a Christian for a long time – do you still have the same love for Christ as when you were converted?

I met a man this week who was not long converted. I felt his enthusiasm for the Lord and I personally felt challenged. I probably know far more about the Bible than he does, but I was impressed with his enthusiasm for Christ. I would encourage each of us,

whether old or young, whatever age we are, to be enthusiastic for Christ. Let us keep appreciating these feet that came into the world to save us.

There are good examples in the Scriptures of those who kept kissing the feet of Jesus. Jesus won the heart of Saul of Tarsus. He then had a lot of sorrow in his life. At Lystra, he was stoned (Acts 14:19), left for dead. After the disciples encircled him, he rose up; and then what did he do? Retire? No – he went on to the next place to spread the good news about a living Saviour. Despite much personal suffering and feeling the burdens of the assemblies, he still kept kissing the feet of Jesus. His epistles are full of Christ, full of the glory of Jesus. At the end of his life he is still kissing the Saviour's feet, knowing the Lord had stood with him (2 Tim 4:17). He was looking forward to being with Him in His heavenly kingdom.

Think of Aquila and Priscilla, these two dear disciples that were with Paul. They provided a base for Paul to operate at Corinth, and then they went to Ephesus. Later when Paul writes the Epistle to the Romans he speaks of them having staked their own neck for his life, Rom 16:3-4. They were so committed to Jesus, they did things together for Him. You can't be committed to Christ, you can't kiss the feet of the Saviour, without doing things for Him. At the end of Paul's life he greets them from the prison at Rome. They had continued to kiss the feet of Jesus.

There were believers that did not keep kissing the feet of Jesus. There is Demas: Demas was a worker, a fellow-worker with Paul (Philemon 24, Col 4:14), but at the end, 2 Tim 4:10, it says "Demas has forsaken me, having loved the present age." I'll tell you what happened – he stopped kissing the feet of Jesus! He would not have loved the present age if he had kept kissing the feet of Jesus. The present age has no time for Jesus, Jesus is rejected here. The world has rejected Jesus, Heaven has received Him – Heaven has crowned Him. One day the crown of all the earth will be His, but meantime He is earth's rejected King. Poor Demas loved the present age – maybe he became too engrossed in business or in other earthly things. He stopped kissing the feet of Jesus.

Keep loving Jesus. The secret of Christianity, the secret of worship, the secret of witness, the secret of enjoying our inheritance among

God's people, is to keep kissing the feet of Christ. I commend this simple thought to you.

Teaching and preaching

I finish with the reference from Acts 5. Before Jesus went to glory, He commissioned the apostles to preach, to teach, to make disciples, and they pursued their work. In Acts 2 we see Peter standing up with the eleven, preaching the gospel, announcing the message, saying "To you is the promise and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God may call," v39. Many then accepted the message, they embraced the promises of God through repentance, through faith in Christ. They then continued in the teaching and fellowship of the apostles, in breaking of bread and prayers, v42. And the holy fear of God was on every one of them.

Numbers were added, reaching five thousand, Acts 4:4 – they all had to be taught! They wouldn't have known what the apostles knew. The apostles had been at a wonderful university – three years with Jesus, learning from Him. They didn't always understand things, sometimes they didn't 'pass their exams' very well, but they sat at the feet of Jesus and they listened to Him. Then, after He arose, He spoke to them of the things concerning Himself, Luke 24:27. When He went to glory the Holy Spirit came, and brought to their remembrance things that Jesus had said.

These apostles, despite being dishonoured for the name, despite being beaten, went on with what Jesus told them to do, "Every day, in the temple and in the houses, they ceased not teaching and announcing the glad tidings that Jesus was the Christ."

Later we see Paul persevering in his ministry. What a wide scope he covered in his three years at Ephesus: the kingdom of God, repentance towards God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, the whole counsel of God. He didn't only teach, he admonished them. "Night and day, I ceased not admonishing each one of you with tears," Acts 20:31. You need skill to admonish. I remember someone telling me that admonishing is reminding people what they should be.

Well, you say, what has that got to do with today? We don't have any apostles, and the Church publicly is in a sorry state today.

What then should happen? Has Christian teaching to stop? Has the gospel preaching to stop?

Paul wrote about such difficult times in his second letter to Timothy. He alerts him to dangers and snares. He says "All who are in Asia ... have turned away from me," 2 Tim 1:15. He names individuals who were bringing false teaching into the Church, and who would overthrow the faith of some, 2 Tim 2:17-18.

Paul tells Timothy to abide in the things that he had learned, 2 Tim 3:14. Timothy had received good teaching from Paul, and learned the sacred letters from his childhood. We were reading about digging this afternoon – Timothy must have done some digging, because Paul, in his first letter, refers to "the good teaching which thou hast fully followed up," 1 Tim 4:6 – what does that mean? He did some digging, he made sure Paul's teaching was fully verified by the Old Testament Scriptures, and he made Paul's teaching his own.

Paul warns there is a time coming when people won't listen to sound teaching and will turn away their ear from the truth. What then does Paul tell him to do? 'Just keep these things to yourself, don't do any more preaching' – does he say that? No, he doesn't, he tells him to pass on to faithful men the good teaching he had received: "The things thou hast heard of me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men," 2 Tim 2:2. He also charges him to evangelise. "*Thou*, be sober in all things, bear evils, do the work of an evangelist," 2 Tim 4:5 – to continue to spread the glad tidings that Jesus is the Christ.

And we are in the days of 2 Timothy. Every one of us here should be concerned that the teaching of God's things and the preaching of the word is continued. Let us accept the charge that, according to our measure, we seek to promote sound teaching and promote the message about our wonderful Saviour who died at the cross at Calvary to make salvation possible to whosoever will.

May the Lord help us all, for His name's sake.

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