

‘Those Flaming Lips’ Rev. Jane Courtright August 11, 2019

Picture in your mind’s eye, and feel with your senses and your heart,
Isaiah’s amazing vision, as described by Fred Buechner:

There were banks of candles flickering in the distance,
and clouds of incense thickening the air with holiness
(and stinging his eyes!)

And high above him, (as if it had always been there,
but was only now seen for what it was)
like a face in the leaves of the trees, or a bear among the stars
THERE WAS THE MYSTERY ITSELF
whose gown was the incense
and the candles a dusting of gold at the bottom.

There were winged creatures shouting back and forth....
the way excited children shout to each other
(when dusk calls them home)
and the whole vast, reeking place
began to shake beneath his feet like a wagon going over cobbles!
and he cried out, “O GOD, I’M DONE FOR!
I am foul of mouth, and the member of a foul-mouthed race.

with my own two eyes, I have seen God.

I'M A GONER AND SUNK!"

Then one of the winged things touched his mouth with fire,

and said, "**THERE, IT WILL BE ALRIGHT NOW.**"

and the Mystery itself said,

"WHO WILL GO? WHOM SHALL I SEND? WHO WILL IT BE?"

And with charred lips, he said, "**ME! HERE I AM. SEND ME!**"

AND THE MYSTERY SAID, "GO.

Go give the deaf Hell 'till you're blue in the face,

and go show the blind heaven till you drop in your tracks...

because they'd sooner eat ground glass

than swallow the pill that puts roses in the cheeks,

and a gleam in the eye. **GO DO IT!"**

Isaiah said, "**DO IT 'TILL WHEN?**

Mystery said, "**"TILL HELL FREEZES OVER."**

Mystery said, "**DO IT 'TILL THE COWS COME HOME."**

And Isaiah **has been doing it**

ever since that day when his lips were **set on fire!**

Words from the flaming lips of Isaiah
(who lived and wrote over 2500 yrs. before WE were born
and over 700 years before Jesus was born)
inspired people in the Prophet's time,
for centuries after in Hebrew Scripture times,
in the days of Jesus....of the Apostles & of the early church...
Isaiah's words inspire people **NOW....**
and will **continue** to do so!!!

Did you know that those flaming lips of Isaiah or his disciples
are quoted more often on the pages of the Christian Scriptures
than any other Hebrew Scripture writer?

Many people believe that surely....
the Psalms are quoted more often. **NOT SO!**

Research shows that it is the book of Isaiah!

John the Baptist blazes his way into the Gospel of Matthew
with words from Isaiah 40:
"The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:
Prepare ye the way of the Lord.
Make straight in the desert a highway for God!"

When **Jesus** began his public ministry,
what words did he use in the Gospel of Luke?

He turned the scroll to the words of Isaiah,
and there in the synagogue at Nazareth, he read:
"The spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free....
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

When **Jesus** came to the end of his ministry on earth,
though he quoted from the Psalms while on the cross,
the last quotation recorded was made from Isaiah 53,
When Jesus said of himself....at the last supper in Luke's Gospel,
"He was numbered with the transgressors."

As **Paul the Apostle** closed his own ministry
(as recorded in the Book of Acts)
He too, used the words of Isaiah, chapter 6, saying,
"The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your ancestors
through the Prophet Isaiah:

*"Go to this people and say,
You will indeed listen, but never understand,
You will indeed look, but never perceive.
For this people's heart has grown dull,
And their ears are hard of hearing,
And they have shut their eyes....
So that they may not look with their eyes,
Or listen with their ears...
And understand with their hearts and turn...
FOR I WOULD HEAL THEM!"*

Some of the **best-known passages from Paul**,
In his letter to the early churches,
ISAIAH SAID FIRST!
To the Ephesians, Paul described a Christian
as a different kind of soldier...with different protective gear:
*"wearing a helmet of salvation
and a breastplate of righteousness."*

Words from Isaiah 59:18!

The author of the Book of Revelations
saw many visions or revelations from God!

Trying to find words to share those visions with other

the author often turned to the Book of Isaiah.

For example, “**God’s wiping away tears**” is described....

but Isaiah had seen a similar vision more than 700 years before,
and already used that very image!

When the author tried to describe the Holy City & its streets of gold...
it said that the gates of that city are never closed.

ISAIAH HAS ALSO SAID THAT!

The author of Revelations said that there
would be a new heaven and a new earth.

They were also words from the Book of Isaiah!

It is truly amazing to discover that many of the familiar verses
of our Christian Scriptures have their roots **in the flaming lips**
of a man who lived over 700 years before!

If you appreciate music, you are aware that Handel’s **MESSIAH**
would not be the **MESSIAH** if the words of Isaiah were removed!
Many of the beautiful anthems and choruses from that famous piece
are rooted in those flaming lips of Isaiah!

Some of our best loved hymns have words that also
come from the book of Isaiah:

Holy, Holy, Holy.....How Firm a Foundation
Watchman Tell Us of the Night...and many more
come from those **FLAMING LIPS OF ISAIAH!**

I read, in The Christian Century an interesting review of a book:

The Holy Reich: Nazi Conceptions of Christianity.

In this book it is pointed out that many Nazi Christians revered Martin Luther.

They believed that Luther had merely begun the German Reformation,
NOT COMPLETED IT.

That was up to them, the Nazis.

And **one thing** many of them saw as essential
was not only the ‘removal’ or extermination of the Jewish people,
but also the removal of the Jewish or Hebrew Scriptures from the
Bible.

The ‘joke’ (if there could be a joke at all)
was on them, because even if they **HAD** taken
the Hebrew scriptures out of the Bible,

they *would not have been able* to remove words from the Book of Isaiah!!!

nor would they have been able to remove Isaiah from music!

Actually, in the Book of Isaiah, a preacher today

(even more than 2500 years after Isaiah died,)

can find text after text for any preaching occasion!

I don't think it's an exaggeration to say

that if all the rest of the Bible were lost or destroyed,

and only the book of Isaiah were saved, **THAT WOULD BE ENOUGH!**

I could preach a whole ministry, and

never turn my eyes from the Book of Isaiah!

I could preach a whole Gospel (or Good News)

and never turn my eyes from the book of Isaiah!

You see, it is **Not** that the Good News of God

Is **NOT** found in the Hebrew Scriptures or Words of the Prophets –

It is just that many people of that time had shut their eyes and ears,

hearts and minds and souls **TO IT.** (sound familiar?)

Jesus, of course a faithful Jewish man himself,

COULD SEE THE GOOD NEWS OF GOD IN THESE PASSAGES,

So, Jesus shone a light on them...made them fresh for the people of God!

In Isaiah is found text after text, passage after passage...

enough to preach an entire lifetime – a vital Gospel!

If I wanted to preach on repentance and forgiveness,

I would find these words from Isaiah 55:

"Seek God while God many found,

Call upon God while God is near;

Let the wicked forsake their way,

And the unrighteous their thoughts;

Let them return to God,

That God may have mercy on them,

And that they may be abundantly pardoned."

ON PEACE: "***They shall beat their swords into plowshares,***

(their semi-automatic assault weapons)

And their spears into pruning hooks;

Nation shall not lift up sword against nation,

Neither shall they learn war no more. (2:4)

ON THE BIBLE: “*The grass withers, the flower fades,* (40:7)

But the Word of God will stand forever.”

ON COMFORT: “**Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God.** (40:1)

Or “**As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you.”**
(66:13)

ON FAITH: “*I will trust and not be afraid.*” (12:2)

ON SOCIAL JUSTICE: “*Remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes.*

*Cease to do evil, learn to do good:
Seek justice, rescue the oppressed,
Defend the orphan, plead for the widow.”*

ALL OF THIS is in Isaiah...and much, much more-

On DISCIPLESHIP, MISSIONS, PRAYER, SIN.....

on and on we could continue (but I won’t, right now).

The GOOD NEWS – FOR ALL TIME – FOR ALL PEOPLE- FOR ALL PLACES:

“Hear O Heavens, and listen, O earth;

For God has spoken...."

FROM THE FLAMING LIPS OF THE PROPHET ISAIAH.

AND ALL THE PEOPLE OF GOD SAY..... AMEN!