

## God's Tattoo

(topic inspired by Rev. Jen Karsner)

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[Jeremiah 31:31-34](#), [Hebrews 5:5-10](#)

Today I'd like to discuss a very important topic – tattoos.

I'm guessing you never expected the subject of tattoos to come up in church! While researching for this week's sermon, I came upon some interesting facts about tattoos:

- Tattoos date back thousands of years, including those found on the famous 'Iceman' dating back approx. 5,200 years.
- Tattoos were exclusive to women – the most common tattoos were placed on the abdomen of a pregnant woman for protection of her and her child during child birth.
- Tattoos were used as a mark of high status.
- The development of intricate geometric designs and more elaborate décor originated with the Polynesian cultures.

- Modern Japanese tattoos are considered works of art.
- Today, 14% of all Americans have tattoos, with men barely outscoring women.

I'm guessing that is more than you ever wanted to know about tattoos! Here are some other observations. I would think getting a tattoo involves a commitment. You really need to like the design which is made to stay on you for life. Getting a tattoo removed is said to be more difficult and painful than having one put on. I'm sure there are many divorced persons that have to go through this painful procedure when the words of a tattoo no longer apply! Once you receive a tattoo, your body is changed – you are not the same as you choose to distinguish yourself in a specific way.

The scripture lesson read for us from Jeremiah describes a process where God intends to write the covenant for God's

people on their hearts. That seems like an interesting approach. God appears to want a more permanent relationship with God's chosen people. If we go back a little perhaps we can better understand this scripture in its context.

The people of Israel had lived in prosperity under King David and King Solomon, yet tensions within the nation began to mount resulting in the split of the kingdom into the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah. You have probably heard the old saying, 'united we stand, divided we fall.' That saying held true for this Kingdom as well. Ten of the original 12 tribes of Judah formed the Northern Kingdom of Israel and were eventually taken over by their enemies the Assyrians. After much ado and several invasions, the Southern Kingdom also fell to the Babylonians, and God's chosen people found themselves once again exiled in a foreign land.

It would be easy to ask, ‘why didn’t God protect them from their enemies?’ It all comes down to God’s covenant. God remained faithful to the covenant, however the people of both Kingdoms chose to ignore God’s covenant and worship other gods. The Old Testament scriptures are very descriptive of how often the Israelites chose a life of sin over the promise of God. Numerous prophets warned the Israelites of the consequences of their actions, yet they had forgotten their covenant with their Creator.

The hard part of this story is to accept that God issued judgment when God’s people continued to ignore their part of the covenant. God’s first commandment was to worship God and to have no other gods before Israel’s God. We have seen other stories where the Israelites definitely had to learn the hard way, and this appears to be another example. When the

Southern Kingdom of Judah fell, the temple was destroyed.

This was the location for the Ark of the Covenant – the very symbol of God’s presence. It appears God was sending a strong message that God would not be confined to the temple so long as God would have to share loyalty with other gods.

Yet in spite of the consequences, God appears to Jeremiah and issues a measure of hope to the people of Israel. Exile will not last forever. Trials build strength and courage. God will once again seek a relationship with God’s people. The difference will be that God will form a more permanent bond with God’s people. God will make it easier to remember because it will be a part of the very being of the people. The emphasis will be on a relationship with God – God will be an internal part of each person. Like a tattoo, the relationship will

stay with God's people as a constant reminder of God's faithfulness and love for us.

So what is written on our hearts? What do we hold so dear that we will never forget their value? For those who are married, you have made a commitment to each other that cannot be forgotten – especially on anniversaries! If you have children, you have made a commitment to nurture and care for those children – you don't have to be reminded of that. Your spouse and children are a part of you – a part of who you are as a person. If you have ever attended college or joined a group, you have made an agreement to hold up your end of the bargain by attending group functions or doing work required for your education. You don't need to be reminded of these things that are important to you. They simply become a part of who you are.

God is also looking to be a part of our lives. Where does God fit into our plans? Where does God fit into our busy schedules? Where does God fit into our very lives? Have we truly taken that step to enter into a personal relationship with God? Perhaps we don't feel as if we are worthy of such a relationship.

Romans 3:23 tells us that all have sinned and fallen short of God's glory. But the story doesn't end there. We have been given an incredible gift through God's only son Jesus. We have all sinned, but Jesus provided the atonement for that sin. When we step up and accept God's saving grace for ourselves, we are making a stand to be God's children – joint heirs with Jesus Christ.

Perhaps we will go through some difficult times. Like I described with the children's sermon, we can only soar when we face the wind. When difficulties come our way, we can look to

God to see us through. God will support us, encourage us, and strengthen us as we face the winds that threaten to pull us aside.

In our most trying times, when we would give anything for another \$20, or when we feel pulled in yet another direction, we are reminded that God is a part of us, like a tattoo written on our hearts. We are never alone. The comfort and peace of God goes with us every step of the way. Amen.