

Isaiah 44:1-5

- ¹ *“But now listen, O Jacob, my servant,
Israel, whom I have chosen.*
- ² *This is what the LORD says—
he who made you, who formed you in the womb,
and who will help you:
Do not be afraid, O Jacob, my servant,
Jeshurun, whom I have chosen.*
- ³ *For I will pour water on the thirsty land,
and streams on the dry ground;
I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring,
and my blessing on your descendants.*
- ⁴ *They will spring up like grass in a meadow,
like poplar trees by flowing streams.*
- ⁵ *One will say, ‘I belong to the LORD’;
another will call himself by the name of Jacob;
still another will write on his hand, ‘The LORD’s,’
and will take the name Israel.* ^(NIV84)
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MARKED AS THE LORD’S

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit Amen.

Lots of people have lots of marks on their bodies. I’d be willing to bet that some of you out there have tattoos as well. Some tattoos are artistic. Others are offensive. Some are hilarious—there are websites dedicated to pictures of tattoos that are misspelled or have otherwise gone horribly wrong.

If you’re bored sometime, just Google “worst tattoos ever” and you’ll see some pretty regrettable ones: “I love Zac Efron” is across one man’s arm. There was one super fan who got a tattoo of his team several months ago – Seattle Seahawks Super Bowl 50 Champions. Only problem, the Seahawks didn’t win Super Bowl 50, they didn’t even play in Super Bowl 50! Whoops!! But now Super fan has a “super” reminder that his team wasn’t quite “super” enough, and that his optimism was a little misguided!!! I heard about a Fantasy Football league that didn’t play for money, what they played for was even better. The loser would have to get a tattoo that the winner designed. It could be of anything and say anything. So if you didn’t want your friends forever and ever to think you are a “sissy girl” it might be best to not be in that league!

How do *you* feel about tattoos? Do you have one? If not, would you ever get one? What would it be of? Would it be just a picture? Would it profess your undying love for your favorite actor, athlete, soda, or meat product? Would you add words? What would they say if you did? (Please make sure to spell them correctly, okay?)

Well, regardless of how you feel about tattoos, would you be surprised to hear that, in a certain sense, God *encourages* you to get a tattoo? Isaiah says it is good to be marked with a message that some will think artistic, others will think offensive. Some might find it hilarious that you have this mark and some might think it makes you a fool. But that’s just fine!! God wants each of us to be marked, “Belonging to the Lord.” What comfort we have to know that we *are* marked as the Lord’s, whether we

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get it inked or not. Whether you can see it on the outside or not, today we'll rejoice that we are **Marked as the Lord's**.

What's the most common choice for a tattoo? A butterfly? A cross? I'd bet it's someone's name. But I'm also guessing that those name tattoos are probably some of the most *regretted* tattoos as well. When the relationship falls apart but the ink remains with the name of the ex-girlfriend or ex-boyfriend you professed your undying love to in ink on your arm, well, that ink just remains as a constant reminder of one's bad decisions—both at the tattoo parlor and in the relationship.

What name would you tattoo on your arm if you had to? And speaking of names, what's in a name? What does your name mean? Do you know? Would it look good as a tattoo? Would you change it if you could?

The Babylonians had a practice of changing someone's name when they took them captive. Just ask Hannaniah (Hah-nuh-*nye*-uh), Mishael (*Mish*-ah-ale), and Azariah (A-zuh-*rye*-uh). Or maybe you know them by their VeggieTale names, Shack, Rack, and Benny? In Daniel 1:7 we're told that the chief officials in Babylon changed their names to Shadrach (*Sha*-drack), Meshach (*Mee*-shack), and Abednego (Uh-*bed*-nih-go).

What was the goal of this Babylonian practice? Well, your new name was to help you identify with your new culture, to assimilate, to forget the old name tattooed on your arm, to forget your old loves, to forget your former home, to forget your former life, and to adapt to the culture around you and become a Babylonian just like them.

For some it worked. They assimilated and joined the ranks, ate the food, and bowed down to the false Gods. But not all of the Judean exiles adopted the motto, "When in Babylon, do as the Babylonians." They didn't eat like them, they didn't behave like them, and they didn't worship the false God's like them.

But how do *we* do? How do *we* handle the pressure? We too are encouraged to change our name to fit the culture. "Christian? That name is so intolerant. Lutheran? That's even worse with all your dogmas and confessions! Why don't you just call yourself American? And then, when in America, do as the Americans. Be young and beautiful! If you just buy things you don't need, with money you don't have, to impress people you don't even like, then you will be happy. Just become one of us."

The message is hammered into our heads over and over again. From the time we first check our smart phones in the morning until we finally doze off in front of the TV at night, it's been estimated that the average American will encounter more than two thousand advertising images in a day. And these images portray over and over again the message: "Fit in! Live this way! Buy lasting happiness!"

And sadly, too often, we, who call ourselves Christians, buy the lie. We reason, "To stand out in the crowd would be most uncomfortable. And furthermore," we continue, trying to convince ourselves, "I can sell my soul to the American dream and claim its promises of prosperity while, at the same time, professing the name of Jesus." So we just go by another name.

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We've all tried it. We've all changed our name from "Christian" to "Fits In" or "One of You," when peer pressure has confronted us. We've all bought the lies of our culture that Satan peddles and have sinned against God. And we've all been left disappointed, when those lies don't deliver the happiness and peace they promise. And like a regrettable tattoo, the results can't be undone. It's there indelibly staining our souls.

Jeshurun (Jeh-shuh-**roon**), the name God calls his people in Isaiah 44, means "straight." But when we try to be straight using the ruler of the culture around us or the measure of Satan's lies, we ironically end up being crooked and depraved. We deserve the name, Jacob, which means "deceiver" as we do all we can to manipulate others into giving us what we want so our selfish desires can be met. We deserve to have the name "Sinner" tattooed on our foreheads like a scarlet "A." We deserve to get inked with the title "Damned" across our face and to be marked for hell. And there's nothing we could do, no laser surgery we could perform, that could ever remove those tattoos.

And we know that if we remain crooked and if we're not straight with God, if we're marked by our sin, we can't get into his heaven. And there is nothing we can do about it. So we need another way!

And thank God that he offers one....

"But now listen, O Jacob, my servant, Israel, whom I have chosen. ² This is what the Lord says—he who made you, who formed you in the womb, and who will help you: Do not be afraid, O Jacob, my servant, Jeshurun, whom I have chosen..."

God made you. God formed you in the womb. And God promises that he *will* help you. How? Starting in chapter 40 of his book, Isaiah gave comfort to God's people again and again: ***"Comfort, comfort My people, says your God."*** (40:1) ***"Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, God is doing a new thing."*** (43:18–19) God was stirring Cyrus to get Israel out of Babylon.

But that wasn't all he was doing! He was also raising up the Suffering Servant to get the *sin* out of Israel. The whole plan was summarized in Isaiah 52:7: ***"How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, 'Your God is King.'"***

Of course, Isaiah was referring to the coming Savior, Jesus, who would pay for their sins. By his perfect life in their place, by his innocent death to pay for their sins, he removed the permanent tattoo of "Sin" that marked their souls. And here in Isaiah 44 he encourages them to get that message inked: ***"write on [your] hand"*** not "belonging to Babylon," "belonging to sin," "belonging to death and hell," but "belonging to Yahweh." ***"Write on [your] hand, 'The Lord's,' and... take the name "Israel."***

And tattoos—God putting his mark on bodies—is nothing new. In Genesis 4:15, God marked Cain. In Genesis 17, he gave Abraham and his offspring the mark of circumcision. Deuteronomy 6:8 describes people tying God's words on their hands and binding them on their foreheads. In his vision, the prophet Ezekiel saw the Lord command a man to use a writing kit to put his mark on the foreheads of the faithful.

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And it all pointed to the most awesome story ever told in human skin. Isaiah describes this body, saying, ***“His appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man, and His form marred beyond human likeness... Like one from whom men hide their faces He was despised, and we esteemed Him not... We all, like sheep, have gone astray. And the LORD has laid upon Him the iniquity of us all.”*** (Isaiah 52:14; 53:3, 6). One spear, three nails, and a crown of thorns left their marks on Jesus more than any tattoo. Even in his resurrected and glorified state, the marks remained so he could offer to Thomas, ***“Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”*** (John 20:27) These scars were the marks of his loyal love, of his free forgiveness, of his everlasting grace—to you and to me.

And because of these marks on Jesus’ body, we get a new name! *Jacob*, the deceiver, is named, *Jeshurun* (Jeh-shuh-**roon**), the straight! Because, by Jesus perfect life in *our* place, by his innocent death which paid for *our* sins, he removed the permanent tattoo of “Sin” that marked *our* souls. Now, we are declared to be straight in line with God’s Word and Gods’ will. We are declared to be straight with Gods’ law, sinless and holy in every way! We are declared to be Christians—little Christs!—as sinless and holy as he.

Because the Lord has poured out his Holy Spirit as, ***“Water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground,”*** even on us Gentiles, now we get a new name marked on us, tattooed on our souls: ***“One will say, ‘I belong to the Lord’; another will call himself by the name of Jacob; still another will write on his hand, ‘The Lord’s,’ and will take the name Israel.”***

Paul describes that tattoo in Galatians 6:17: ***“I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.”*** Now, our eyes are marked with kindness and with compassion. Our minds are marked with toughness and with truth. Our hands are marked with helpfulness and with humility. And our mouths are marked with Jesus and with joy.

We have one word marked on us: *leyahweh* (Le-**Yah**-weigh)—in English, “Belonging to the Lord.” It’s not marked with ink on our arm or ankle or back, like a tattoo. But it’s marked with water on our heads and on our hearts. Remember those words spoken at your baptism? ***“Receive the sign of the cross on your head and on your heart to mark you as a redeemed child of Christ.”***

And so, just because we live in Babylon does not mean we will live like the Babylonians. Just because we live in America, doesn’t mean we live like Americans. Your life and mine tell another story. They tell it in our skin, in the way we act, in the way we live, in the way we love. To some it will be beautiful, even artistic. Others will find it horribly offensive. We will find it, not hilarious, but joyful, as we live to display our Savior by the mark of our lives. So whether you get it inked on your skin, or just show it in your life, you are indelibly marked with a new name: “Belonging to the Lord.” In thanks to Jesus, and in his name, amen.

Now may the peace of God which transcends all understanding guard your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus. Amen.