**Psalms 100:1-5** Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth! **2**  Serve the Lord with gladness! Come into his presence with singing! **3** Know that the Lord, he is God! It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. **4**  Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name! **5**  For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.

**Isaiah 44:1-5** “But now hear, O Jacob my servant, Israel whom I have chosen! **2** Thus says the Lord who made you, who formed you from the womb and will help you: Fear not, 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 my Spirit upon your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants. **4** They shall spring up among the grass like willows by flowing streams. **5**  This one will say, ‘I am the Lord’s,’ another will call on the name of Jacob, and another will write on his hand, ‘The Lord’s,’ and name himself by the name of Israel.”

**1 Peter 2:4-10** As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, **5**  you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. **6** For it stands in Scripture: “Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.” **7** So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,” **8** and “A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense.” They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do. **9** But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. **10**  Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

**John 10:27-30** My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. **28**  I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. **29** My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. **30**  I and the Father are one.”

In the name of Jesus. Amen. Some call it “body art” or being “inked.” Most use the word, “tattoo” for what they see on a person’s body. The concept of tattoos is no longer taboo and a mainstream activity in the western world. When I traveled with the youth a couple years ago to Tacoma, Wa. I saw tattoo shops before so no big deal. It just happened to be that out there was the first time I saw tattooing done right at the mall.

Tattoos have taken on a different purpose from the past. What was once a religious ritual or a sign of rebellion. Is for many a form of self-expression. The Hollywood star Johnny Depp has said, “My body is my journal and my tattoos are my story lyrics.”[[1]](#footnote-1) Even businesses are looking to pay people to carry their brand name or logo on their body. Whatever the tattoo, the permanent nature definitely makes anyone think twice.

Isaiah the prophet also wanted the exiles in Babylon to be marked. It was not for self-expression, but their salvation. He said, “This one will say, ‘I am the Lord’s…” It was even a visible fact to see saying, “another will write on his hand, ‘The Lord’s’…” An easier way to translate this Hebrews Word is to say, “Belonging to the Lord.” This reminder was not going to be mainstream in Babylon, but God meant His Name to be for His people.

Of course, the Babylonians already had false gods. A big one for them was Marduk who created the world. He did this by warfare with another god. From her death, he made the universe. Pomp and praise over Marduk surrounded the Jewish exiles with the Babylonian religion. In addition, the defeated enemies of Babylon had different names. We all know Daniel, but to King Nebuchadnezzar he was Belteshazzar. Rather than be marked as God’s people of promise and their return to Israel, there was a competing brand saying, “Enjoy your place in Babylon.”

Youthfulness, money, and self-fulfillment are the trademark song today. Our society has no need for Marduk, when the power of creating comes from marketing. Advertisements fly around Americans numbering about 5,000 for each person daily. Thirty years ago, it was only 2,000.[[2]](#footnote-2) What does this mean? The motto for all these ads hammers away at us concerning, “health, wealth, happiness.” The material is touted as lasting triumph while the spiritual just slows us down. Consumerism seeks to crush the God who works by suffering, death, and even His cross.

The Great Deceiver plans to consume the name of God’s people. It is to make baptism not about death and life in Christ, but what is in it for me. It is to silence those called out of darkness by not wanting to stand apart from the crowd. It is to humiliate “a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God,” that such honor is worthless to other glories at the present. It is to make it appear we can have the best of both worlds, even if Jesus said, “No one can serve two masters…” (Matthew 16:24a). The American dream at the end of the day does not save us from sin, death, and the Devil.

Isaiah the prophet took on the Babylonian lie that led Israel astray. Overwhelmed from false worship of Marduk the Lord declared, “Before me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after me” (Isaiah 43:10). The bareness of the exiles was not going to remain in Babylon. God promised His Word was going forth in the land to bring life back to Israel. “I will pour my Spirit upon your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants.” They were not only to say, “I am the Lord’s,” but could even write in on their hands.

God marked His people of old on their bodies. Cain received such a mark to protect him from death after murdering Abel. Abraham received this mark in the flesh of every male born child by circumcision. Of course, Isaiah reveals how the Messiah would be marked above all. “He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.” (Isaiah 53:3) Jesus exposed the lie holding us captive by letting sin, death, and the Devil consume Him.

The marks made at the cross are now life for those in exile. Jesus set the first disciples free by showing them His hands and side. St. John marked his words by saying, “these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (John 20:31). St. Paul gave a witness to his freedom by the Gospel in suffering saying, “I bear on my body the marks of Jesus’ (Galatians 6:17).

The true tattoo before God is now baptism into Christ. He washes away the mark of sin and death by His sacrifice. “Belonging to the Lord” is a promise marking us in God’s Name. It is for Jesus to say every day, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.” He knows how to forgive the weary sheep that we are with His Word. He offers life by way of the cross for the wandering sheep that we tend to be. He is faithful to the end for all His sheep belong to Him.

Israel in exile was to “fear not” for God marked them. Our modern day Babylon will not consume us for the calls goes out by Word and Sacrament. The baptized bare no fancy tattoo only a life of repentance before Jesus. None needs to live like Babylon for we are, “a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious….” Jesus holds the marks that last. His love pours out the Spirit telling any, “You belong to the Lord.” Amen. In the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

1. http://www.searchquotes.com/quotation/My\_body\_is\_my\_journal\_and\_my\_tattoos\_are\_my\_story./453543/ [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. http://www.numberof.net/number-of-advertisements-seen-in-a-day/ [↑](#footnote-ref-2)