

Tattoos

Chris van Straaten
07/08/11

Sermon preached on reading: Isaiah 49:16

I've been finding about tattoos. Apparently you have to be 18 to have a tattoo done commercially, and you can pay anything between £50 and £120 per hour, depending on the quality of the tattooist's work. Having a simple thing done, like the name "John" tattooed on your arm, would take 30-40 minutes, while having a 3 or 4 inch picture done would take perhaps 5 hours.

And it hurts! Your arms are the least painful place, whilst your torso, especially on your ribs, it's extremely painful. Interestingly, the soles of your feet and the palms of your hands are the most painful place of all; if you've had a splinter in your finger or stood on something like a plug or a stone in bare feet, you'll understand that, let alone having a needle tattooing you.

Why do people have tattoos done? Any number of reasons. For some it's more for themselves; for others, it's to show off to other people. For some it's to conform: they think tattoos are cool; while for others it's to stand out and not conform: if you have tattoos visible on your hands, neck or face you could lose your chance of a job. I gather that tattoos are an issue in the police force at present.

What's their appeal? Probably something to do with them being permanent - removing them is not easy. Also, the tattooist I spoke to said that they appeal because they cost you: in your time, your money and in pain. He said, "You go through something to get it, to earn it; you go through something physical." So, perhaps, if you have "Mum" or your children's names tattooed on your arm, you are showing how much they mean to you because of what you've gone through to have them done: the time, the cost, and the pain. At a wedding I took recently I noticed that the groom had his fiancée's name tattooed on his hand.

Now in the Bible it says that God's got a tattoo- sort of: "See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands." Or, in another translation, "I have written your name on the palms of my hands" (Isaiah 49:16). Not very many people have tattoos on their hands, and it's usually on the back of their hands: "Love, hate", numbers. Apparently a swallow tattooed on the back of your hand may show that you've done time in prison. But on the palms of your hands? Remember what I was told: it's the most painful place of all to have tattooed, along with the soles of your feet; and also it's the most difficult place to make the tattoo last; you have to use a special technique or equipment. The Bible says that God's got our names tattooed on the palms of his hands. Why the palms? Perhaps to hold us up, perhaps to protect us, perhaps as a reminder to himself of how much He cares for us. After, all, nobody else is likely to see a tattoo on your palms. And what else is on the palms of Jesus' hands? The nail marks from the Crucifixion. Even after his resurrection Jesus still had them. He went through huge pain to have our names on the palms of his hands!

Of course that verse is picture language, but often picture language helps us understand more of God: how precious we are to Him, and how much it cost Him to show his love for us.

Chris van Straaten