

Manifest Destiny  
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 Texts: Psalm 19, Ezekiel 36:22-36

I have been praying for God to move and intervene in our country's current direction. What I am seeking is a major disruption of our apparent drift into open depravity, godless miseducation, national chaos and international recklessness. The volatility of our political climate is alarming so I would love to see that dialed back as well—which requires much deliberate effort to rein in the rhetoric (name-calling, blame shifting and vilification). God is, according to the prophetic stream, about to bring a day of reckoning to America as He pursues His plan and purposes—His Manifest Destiny—and I am obliged to try to lay out just what that would/might look like. Hence this sermon on God's Manifest Destiny.

Manifest Destiny was a 19th century nationalistic doctrine which purportedly validated and vindicated the westward expansion of these United States. The notion has fallen out of favor almost entirely as we no longer believe, as a nation, in the nobility of that cause. More currently, that westward movement is viewed as imperialistic, a throwback to evil colonialism which we threw off in separating from the Crown of England! European oppression (with its endless dynastic and religious wars—and taxes to fund military adventurism!—was eluded as we chose to build upon our past, seeking liberty and justice for all—as in the emancipation of all slaves (regardless of race!)—seeking a more perfect union. The manifest destiny which matters however, is not nationalistic in nature, nor is it American; but it is biblical. For example, in Psalm 19 our attention is drawn to what the heavens are *declaring* and the works of God are *proclaiming*—sourced by David in nature and Scripture (the “world-book” and the “word-book!”), a song from his shepherding days to enrich Hebraic worship. But in the latter verses, the transformation of the believer is presented as central to God's plan and purposes! So I can assure you that the nationalistic ambitions, the westward expansion of the United States, past, present to future, are not what Psalm 19 is revealing! No, in this scriptural setting “manifest destiny” is about *the ultimate fulfillment of the purposes of God*—the history of our nation is but a blip on the big screen of world history. We purpose to look into God's grand design together this morning.

Psalm 19 begins with adulation, praise of God's glory and of his works as writ large in creation. There is a testimony of heavens, and the coinciding proclamations of God's works. Romans 1 revisits this dynamic. Psalm 19:4, however, reads in part, thus: **in them He has placed a tent for the sun.** The **in them** alludes to the **telling heavens** and the **declaring works**—both being allied in the *proclamation business* of nature, both shouting **the glory of God**. Truly they are doing that; *but there is more to this than mere nature can declare.* And

that is what we hope to lay more bare this morning. We want to know why God has put a tent **in the midst of their expanse**—what does that tent signify? What does it mean specifically for us, for our part in the manifest destiny of God of which *we are an essential part*. We are those in whom God displays His mighty works!

For instance, in John 9, we may recall that Jesus declared that the man born blind (which Exodus 4: 11 attributes to the will of God—who makes the **seeing** and **the blind!**) was blind so that the works of God might be displayed in him. It is likely that he didn't know that was the case; the disciples certainly didn't. So *the purpose of the tent, the why*, lies in whom it shelters, the sun. And who this “sun” is might be the One who comes forth from that **tent placed in the expanse of them**—namely Jesus, the what.

Hence this is no ordinary tent! And it is not placed there for a natural sun, a solar center, say; but rather for a **Bridegroom coming out of his chamber**. Jesus likens himself to a **bridegroom** when he defended his disciples from the criticism that they did not fast as the disciples of John and the Pharisees did! **No one fasts while the Bridegroom is with them!** *They rejoice, celebrate and feast!* Therefore I suggest to you that this “sun” is none other than the **Son of God**, namely Jesus Christ; who is **yearning to run** his course (our salvation) as a **strong man** leans into a race. He has a mighty work, our redemption, to accomplish and when He is, temporarily, placed in the tent, He is eager to get on with the work of redemption. That is a proper interpretation of **the tent**, this sanctuary placed in the midst of the **expanse of the heavens and creation** (meaning “the works of God”).

This picture is *messianic* in nature. The Messiah plays a key part of the “manifest destiny” of God. It is from God and heaven that our help comes—**from His right hand!**—we cannot see ourselves scientifically, educationally, or politically! Psalm 20:6-7 clarifies these assertions: **Now I know that the Lord saves His anointed**—meaning, us!—**he will answer him from his holy heaven with the saving strength of his right hand. Some boast in chariots, and some in horses, But we will boast in the name of the Lord our God. Remember that last phrase!** He, the sun/son, is **rejoicing** to get on with this redemption work. His “heat,” figuratively speaking, affects everything and everyone!

David is reminding us that our redemption is not earth-bound, limited but is rather, cosmic in nature: the whole of creation is in view here! It is not nationalistic. Not only that but also the entirety of redemptive history—all included in the scope of this Davidic vision *written before the time of Ezekiel*.

Redemptive history began with the imparting of the Law, of course, and that occurred in the time of the patriarchs. But it doesn't end there. Now, as a point of

fact, the connection of Psalm 19 with Ezekiel 36 came sheerly from my devotions and without any cross references involved (there are none). Neither passage is particularly *personal* in a religious sense except, perhaps, in the closing verses 12-14 of Psalm 19. **Then I will be blameless** is both profoundly personal and religious. Psalm 19:11-13, particularly, after pointing out that all of this (the Law) serves to warn the Lord's servant, adds that there is **great reward in heeding them** (that is the Laws, statutes and commandments), takes a deeper dive into the "condition" of the human soul, as an "embattled place." This warning, of course, is a great spiritual blessing.

David cries, **Who can discern his errors?** (The anticipated, but unspoken response is "no one can.") Therefore, with David, we must plead, **acquit me, God, of hidden faults as well as restrain me from presumptuous sins.** This means asking God both to forgive me and to rescue me! For we are in bondage to sin *unless* the Lord acts to forgive and release us. Forgiveness is viewed as a profound spiritual liberation. **Let them not rule over me** refers to both **hidden faults** and **presumptuous sins**. And here comes the blessed outcome: **Then I will be blameless.** (v.13). That is the end point of redemption (David's) and serves as a major bridge to Ezekiel 36. This "work" was achieved through the Law and it is very similar in scope to the healing episode in John 9.

So all of this (vv. 1-13) prepares us, sets us up for this most familiar, often cited verse: **Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in thy sight.** (v.14). I mean all this adoration and praise (vv.1-4b); all of this messianic prophecy (vv. 4c-6); and all of this instruction on the law (vv. 7-11); and the personal application (vv. 12-13) make up the context for this heartfelt plea (v.14). **O Lord, my rock and my Redeemer.** Let the redeemed of the Lord say so. Ezekiel is likewise addressed to God's people collectively and yet the "whole people of God" includes individuals reclaimed, renewed and recreated by God. God does both of these redemptive actions.

So, in our run-up to Ezekiel 36: 22-36, we are reminded by Psalm 19:7 that the **Law is perfect . . . restoring the soul.** Really? What does that even mean? Does it mean God doing a complete make-over, renovation, restoration and remodeling of everything? Yes, definitely, something like that, something of that order. And we read, **the testimony (of the Law) is sure . . . making even the simple wise.** How's that? By making the law accessible to even the simple, who can read it!, divine wisdom that is outside their ability to acquire on their own—unassisted by divine revelation—belongs to all. We can look it up and read what we need to know, and the text is sufficient and, yet, more even than that! **The precepts are right . . . rejoicing the heart.**

How splendidly kind of God to factor *more than* happiness into the mix! Yes, joy rejoicing . . . how vital, active and alive that joy must be.

The Lord's **commandments are pure, delighting the eye**. Scripture repeatedly defies our expectations, serendipitously taking us to accustomed vistas . . . places we would never visit *except that God has so beautified our lives as to lead us there*. Pure water, pure air . . . we are acclimated to filters and purifiers of these natural things; but the purity of the commandments?!—the absolute clearness and the accompanying clarity of vision is what is intended. **The judgments of the Lord are true; they are righteous altogether**. (v. 9). Purity here is inseparable from what is “right” and “eternally true.” Psalm 19 also declares that the **fear of the Lord is clean** without impurity and it endures forever! So there we have it: perfect, sure, right, pure and clean—the Law is all of these things, all of these qualities!

And, it follows that justice is from heaven, *originating with God* and not arising from the history of jurisprudence and evolving case law—both traditions of man. This truth is expressed very clearly in Exodus 18:15b,16: **because the people come to me to inquire of God. When they have a dispute, it comes to me and I judge between a man and his neighbor and make known the statutes of God**. The statutes of God are the goal of the inquiry, the reason for going to court!, rather than winning a judgment, getting a settlement or an acquittal. *If both parties come seeking the will of God, then both can leave the controversy satisfied when they learn what that is.*

Jethro's (godly) counsel, which follows, reflects this understanding that justice comes from God. **You be the people's representative before God, and you bring the disputes to God, then teach them the statutes and laws, and make known to them the way in which they should walk, and the work they are to do**. Note: this passage reiterates much of what was said to/of Abraham: **For I have chosen him so that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice, so that the Lord may bring upon Abraham, what he has spoken about him. (Gen. 18:19)** (That is to say, the promises of the land, to become a great and mighty nation and that **in him all nations will be blessed** (v. 18) through his seed.) Such precious and sweet truth!

Manifest Destiny is, if we remember, our topic; and for an expansion of that theme we now turn to Ezekiel 36:22-36. Ezekiel 36 refers to the redemptive work of God viewed, remember, on a corporate level as affecting the whole people of God.

Ezekiel 36:22: **Therefore . . . It is not for your sake, O house of Israel** (meaning “my people”) **that I am about to act, but for my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations, where you went** (where you were dispersed, or placed—we are all placed by God). That is a humbling qualification! **I will vindicate**, God says, **the holiness of my great name which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst. *That is the great sin of America—we are actively dishonoring God, socially, culturally, politically!* Then the nations will know that I am the Lord, declares the Lord God, **when I prove myself holy among you in their midst. *That is what God is about to address and correct.*****

This is the manifest destiny of God to make God’s name holy in America, in the midst of unholiness (which signifies just where, I fear, we are)! AND this is the shape of His kind intentions toward us. He is going to “Psalm 19” us in the midst of the world we are set in. Yes, in that profaned world which we have promoted, contributed to . . . in that setting God will do a work; he will use us as a testimony, *to vindicate his holy name.*

And the nations all around us, seeing this(!) will be turned to God by the transformation He works in us, His people, for His name’s sake, *and not for our sakes*. It could hardly be clearer: that it is not merely about us but about the “manifest destiny” of God. This means that no one has the “luxury” of claiming to be insignificant, or invisible—our lives matter (to God) in the larger scheme offering a testimony of God’s existence and holiness. ***The testimony of our transformation will change the hearts of the nations!*** That is a very, very important matter.

So just how’s that going to come about? First, there will be an *ingathering*. **I will take you from the nations . . . from all the lands, and gather you into your own land.** Just as he has apparently done with us here in America, *granting us access to land*. And after gathering, and planting us in the land (step two) God will **sprinkle clean water upon us; I will cleanse you and make you clean from all your filthiness and from all your idols.** (v. 25) That’s the third step.

Are you picking up on all the **I will’s** here, as I am? It is not what we do, not even about what God does to us personally and individually, but, finally, ***what he will do to us*** to accomplish what he is going to do!

Moreover, that is, *after all of this*, God will give us **a new heart and I will put a new spirit in you, and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes and you will be careful to observe my ordinances.** (vv. 26-27) This is a parallel thought to what God spoke to the three witnesses on the

mountain of transfiguration: **This is my Beloved Son . . . Listen to him.** They saw His glory and the sight of that has changed the world . . . and everything in it.

After we are cleansed of all our filthiness and the influences of our idolatries (step three above), there comes this heart transplant (of flesh for stone); we arrive at being God's people and He is established as our God. And this is a way station on the divine journey of manifest destiny. That's when we come to the fourth step, *the calling forth of grain and of fruit*. God calls forth the fecundity of the earth, the productivity of crops resulting in the abolition of famine. (v. 29) and the removal of the disgrace of famine along with that.

**Then you will remember your evil ways and your deeds that were not good, and you will loathe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and your abominations.** (v. 31) The abominations relate to the **filthiness** (see v. 25) and covers a multitude of deviances and depravity "celebrated" openly in our day and claimed as "rights" worthy of legal protection as well as promulgation in our schools and colleges. This seems severe, but remember this retrospect only comes afterwards, after transformation, after rebirth and the blessings which succeed the obedience that God himself has brought about **in vindication of His Holy Name!** While it is not for our sakes, but for His glory, we should **Be ashamed and confounded in your ways, O house of Israel** (i.e. My people)!

**On the day that I shall cleanse you from all your iniquities, I will cause cities to be inhabited, and the waste places will be rebuilt. The desolate land will be cultivated instead of being a desolation in the sight of everyone who passes by.**

Be encouraged, beloved, God is about to do a great thing. You will see it.

**Amen**