

OUR MANIFEST DESTINY

1 JOHN 3:4-15

Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness. And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin. Whoever abides in Him does not sin. Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him.

Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous. He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil. Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God.

In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother.

For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another, not as Cain who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother's righteous.

Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you. We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death. Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.

If you've ever studied American history you're familiar with the political doctrine called "[Manifest Destiny](#)."

The phrase was coined in 1845. It was the belief in our "[Manifest Destiny](#)" that propelled our country's territorial expansion across the North American continent.

In the early half of the 19th century, a rapid birth rate and increasing immigration caused the US population to explode. To make room for more Americans the country pushed its boundaries westward. In 1803 the Louisiana Purchase doubled our size. The annexation of Texas, the Oregon Territory, and eventually California followed.

"[Manifest Destiny](#)" was the idea that our country was *destined by God* to spread democracy, and capitalism, and a better way of life across the continent. This was the driving force behind our westward expansion.

This belief provided our government a justification for gaining control of more territory, and enlarging our borders, until America stretched from sea to shining sea.

It's interesting, that more than economies, and wars, and elections - but *an idea about the will of God* shaped our history. "[Manifest Destiny](#)" is what turned thirteen east coast colonies into a transcontinental super power.

God-ideas can work miracles! When God's plan is revealed, and our God-appointed destiny becomes clear, we're motivated to get in sync, and live accordingly.

The word "*manifest*" means "[to reveal, to showcase, to put on display](#)." And God *has* displayed His purposes.

This morning, we want to discuss several truths that the Apostle John believed in that have the potential of altering our lives in real, and tangible, and eternal ways.

God's manifestations still shape our destiny.

John begins in verse 4, "Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness." Realize, sin isn't just a mistake, or a memory lapse ("Oh, I forgot") or a slip up, or even a character flaw, it's more.

Sin is a disdain for the rules - "*sin is lawlessness.*"

This is important to understand. The reason sin is such an affront to God is it's the desire to shake off all restraint. It's rebellion... God created us. He sustains us. And sin is the coup 'd 'etat against His government.

Sin is turning up your nose to God's authority.

Musician Elton John once told a German magazine, "I am gay and wouldn't want to be heterosexual for all the money in the world... I've got enough money, don't have to follow any rules, don't have to be in the office from nine to five and take the kids to school in the morning. It is simply a fantastic life when you don't have any parameters. It's brilliant." Apparently, Elton's lifestyle is all about himself - never blessing or giving of himself to others - just doing *whatever he wants, whenever he wants*. Nobody can tell him what to do.

And there are heterosexuals with the same attitude.

In fact, I know folks who are perceived as Christian - *they're good-deed-doing, law-abiding, morally-minded, and commandment-keeping* on the **outside**, but on the **inside** they're just as rebellious as Elton John.

It reminds me of Nita Friedman. She's a 66 year old lady who was driving down Highway 95 in Bonners Ferry, Idaho when the police tried to pull her over.

Nita refused to stop. A police chase ensued.

The cops chased this little old lady 15 miles, across two counties. She was finally captured when a spike strip was placed in the road in front of Nita's car. Three flat tires ended the ordeal... And here's the kicker, for the entire chase Nita Friedman never exceeded the speed limit or broke a traffic law. She was the perfect driver, she just didn't want to be inconvenienced, or interrupted, or told what to do by someone else.

This is why John says, "*sin is lawlessness.*" People sin not because it's a better way to live than godliness, *or even more fun!* They sin because they don't want to live under God's laws. They just don't want to be told what to do by someone else. Their heart is full of pride.

And here's the good news from our text - this is what Jesus came into the world to fix! *He changes hearts.*

Read verse 5, "*And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin.*" Here's why Jesus came into the world, "*to take away our sin.*" Actually, over the course of this letter John mentions five reasons Jesus came into the world.

The second is in 3:8, "*that He might destroy the works of the devil.*" The third is in 4:9, "*that we might live through Him.*" The fourth is in 4:10, He was sent "*to be (our) propitiation (or place of mercy).*" And last, but not least, 5:20, "*that we may*

know Him who is true.” Jesus came to reveal the eternal God’s true nature.

But the first reason is here in verse 5, *“to take away our sins.”* When John the Baptist saw Jesus on the banks of the Jordan River, he pointed to Him and said, *“Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”* Again, Jesus came *“to take away our sin.”*

And remember our *“sin is lawlessness.”* Our sin isn’t just a case of runaway hormones, or a lack of stamina, or the inability to stay awake, or to control an appetite, etc. It’s blatant rebellion. It’s resisting the constraints imposed on me by God. Sin is due to a rebel heart.

And if anybody can solve such a problem it can only be Jesus. Notice what’s said of Him in verse 5, *“in Him there is no sin.”* Such a statement can only be made about Jesus. He alone falls into the *“sinless”* category.

Understand, with God sin is transferable. The sin of the guilty can be passed to the innocent. This meant Jesus can bear *our sin* since *“in Him there is no sin.”*

Let’s say when you walked in this morning the usher asked you, *“Tell me your worse sin of all time?”* You cleared your throat and said, *“I once took money from my boss.”* The usher wrote, *“Bill the Embezzler”* on a name tag, and slapped the sticky on your chest.

Then the next person walked through the door. The usher asks her what was the worst thing you’ve done. The lady

says, *“I once had sex with an old boyfriend.”* She’s handed the name tag, *“Ansley the adulteress.”*

Imagine, everybody in church this morning, with a name tag... *“Sally the shoplifter,” “Neely the greedy,” “Lou the lustful,” “Gretchen the gossip,” “Max the manipulator,” “Leslie the liar.”* on and on it goes...

By the way, what would your name tag read?

But that’s when Jesus walks into the room. And since He has no name tag, He starts snatching tags off of everyone He meets. Yanking the tag off your chest and mine, and putting it on His. After a while, there stands Jesus *the embezzler, the adulterer, the shoplifter, the greedy, the lustful, the gossip, the manipulator, the liar.*

He’s wearing all **our** tags... Since, He has never been tagged with a sin, He’s able to wear our tags. As Paul said, *“He who knew no sin was made sin for us.”*

And on the cross Jesus paid the penalty for all those sins. He came into the world *“to take away our sins.”*

John writes, *“Whoever abides in Him does not sin. Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him.”*

Here’s what I’m calling the Christian’s *“Manifest Destiny.”* God’s truth can shape a person’s outcome.

If Jesus came *“to put away sin”* - if *“in Him there is no sin...”* then it stands to reason *“whoever abides in Him does not sin.”* This is our *Manifest Destiny.*

What’s *true in our spirit* places us on a trajectory. The truth becomes our driving force - it impacts our destiny.

Now don't let verse 6 confuse you. Understand what this verse does NOT mean. John isn't teaching sinless perfection - that a person can live a sin-free life.

John said earlier in the letter, 1:8, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." Hey, we all *blows it* and John *knows it!*

In the original language the verb "*sins*" in verse 6 is in the present tense. It could be translated, "*continues in sin.*" Whoever abides in Christ *won't continue to sin.*

The Greek word translated "*sin*" is "*harmatia*" which means "*to miss the mark.*" This was the term used when a marksman - an archer - missed his target.

Man's problem is not that he occasionally misses God's glory. It's not that his eye tends to mist up, or he gets distracted, or his hand slips... No, **his aim is bad.**

Our problem is internal. Our nature has been twisted and stained. We've been bent so we no longer shoot straight. Shock-jock, Howard Stern, recently said, "**You're warped. I'm warped. We're all warped.**" And that's a really accurate description of human nature.

This is why Jesus said to Nicodemus, "**Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.**" We're born with a warped, lawless nature. Thus, Jesus needs to birth in us a new nature. He transforms *our spirit* with *His Spirit*. He turns us into **a straight-shooter.**

Of course, this new nature doesn't mean I'll no longer slip up and sin. It can happen, but the problem is no longer

internal to my spirit - *it's external*. It's **the flesh, the world, the devil** that now causes me to miss.

My flesh - *that is, my mind and body* - can fail me. The world can distract me. The devil can trap me.

This all means the key to Christian living is learning to live out the new nature Jesus implants inside my heart - *to love God and to love others* - and overcome the outward enemies that want to sidetrack that love.

As believers there will be times when we'll miss the mark, but it's no longer because we can't aim correctly.

As we learn to overcome *the flesh, the world, the devil* we'll hit the target more consistently. It's said, **"A believer isn't sinless, but he does sin less and less..."**

Before I came to Christ I occasionally slipped up and did good, but the flow of my life was toward sin and selfishness. Now that I'm in Christ I slip up and sin, but my prevailing desire is to please God and love others.

John is saying, if **"in Jesus there is no sin"** - then it's the **manifest destiny**, the God-ordained inevitably, that the person who abides in Jesus will overcome sin.

It may not happen overnight - just as America didn't conquer the continent in a day - but because people believed it was God's will for them to do so, they kept pushing westward and it eventually became a reality.

And John is saying the same is true for a Christian. In Christ we are on *a trajectory toward victory*.

John says in verse 7, “Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous. He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning.”

It's like father like son. It's another inevitability, like it or not. In ways, you and I will look and act like our dad. His quirks we'll mimic. There will be a resemblance.

Again, it's your **manifest destiny** to favor your father.

And this is certainly true spiritually. God is righteous, so His offspring will be righteous. Whereas, Satan is evil, and *his* kids make up a long line of sinners.

This Friday I watched Billy Graham's funeral, and you could see the dad in all four of his children. They're adults now - senior citizens themselves - but when they talked you heard their dad. In their faces you saw Billy.

The older I get the more I act like my dad. From the jokes I tell - to the way I walk - *I am my father's son*.

And this is true spiritually. A child of God acts godly, and those who are of the devil gravitate toward evil.

We know God is good. He does what's right. *He's righteous!* This means His kids will more times than not, also do the right thing... If you're born of God and have His nature, it doesn't mean you won't be tempted, it just means you'll lean to the right, *literally!* You'll want to do the right thing by God and by your fellow man.

Whereas John says, “*the devil has sinned from the beginning.*” If you don't know God you can go through spells of righteousness - times where your conscience bothers you

and try to do right - but Satan knows he has you. All he has to do is tighten the choker and you come cowering back to him. *The chain has never been broken.* The child of God and the slaves of the devil have track records. Over time you can tell who's who.

It reminds me of a quote. Recently, I heard someone say, "You can't fake good kids." Well-behaved kids are evidence their parents must've done something right.

And you can't fake your spiritual parentage either.

Once, me and my three older kids were walking around the corner of the house - *Zack, Nick, and Nat.*

The kids were just tots. We'd turned the corner when I spit into the yard. That's when Zack spit - then Nick - then... *You guessed it...* my little darling daughter spit.

Kathy was on the back porch and saw it! She couldn't believe I was teaching my little girl to spit.

But it's inevitable, kids mimic their fathers. As the old saying goes, "The nut doesn't fall far from the tree."

Kids act like their dad, and this is true spiritually.

If God is your Dad you'll make a habit of doing what's right - but if you habitually sin, and harbor hatred in your heart, then you're a child of the devil.

Verse 8 tells us, "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested..." *Here's another reason Jesus came into this world, "that He might destroy the works of the devil."* He came to break Satan's chokehold on humanity - to snap the chains of sin and set us free.

In John 10:10 Jesus exposes Satan's motive for mankind, "The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy." He works to rip us off - put us down - and wipe us out. But Jesus provides 24 hour-a-day security. Satan is out to kill us - but Jesus is a bodyguard. He'll take a bullet for you... *or even a nail.*

Satan wants to destroy. Jesus desires for you a better life. He promises "life and life more abundantly."

Jesus opposes the works of the devil. The words that roll from Satan's lips most often are, "Foiled again!"

And if it's Jesus' *manifest purpose* to untangle what Satan has twisted; then it's your *manifest destiny* to live a free, and untangled, and straightened out life.

The Greek word translated "*destroy*" is the term used for a shipwreck. Think of a wooden hull breaking up in the churning surf. The kingdom of Jesus acts like the battering waves that ultimately demolish the works of the devil. It may take time to accomplish, but in John's mind victory is the inevitable destiny of every Christian.

He says in verse 9, "Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin (literally "*sin continually*"), because he has been born of God." Understand how God judges believers and non-believers. He uses different criteria.

With a believer God looks at *His seed in my life - what's been planted in my heart*. If a person has been born of God it may not be evident yet - the seed may not have fully sprouted

- but the seed of righteousness is alive and growing, and will eventually bloom.

Righteousness is that person's inevitable destiny.

But an unbeliever lacks God's seed in their life. Thus, no matter how hard they try - no matter the good they do, it's not enough to blossom into what God desires. **For lack of a seed, God judges the deeds.**

Listen to how JB Philips translates verses 8-9, "The man whose life is habitually sinful is spiritually a son of the devil, for the devil has been a sinner from the beginning. Now the Son of God came to earth with the express purpose of undoing the devil's work. The man who is really God's son does not practice sin, for God's nature is in him, for good, and such a heredity is incapable of sin." Realize, John's doctrine is focused on spiritual heredity. **Good seed** produces right living. **No seed** yield a barren life, that gets left to the devil.

The idea that your underlying nature - your spiritual genetics, in essence - determines righteousness and unrighteousness should be an easy concept for our modern world to grasp. For today, every dysfunction and aberrant behavior gets blamed on genetics.

Serial killers, homosexuals, alcoholics will all tell you they're born that way. *And in a sense they're right...*

All humans are born with a proclivity toward sin. Little babies are born lawless. You don't have to teach them to rebel. It comes naturally. We can blame all our problems on the sin nature we inherited from Adam.

But the reason we can't duck responsibility for our lives, is that *through Jesus we can be born again!* He is the answer! A new nature is available to each of us.

Jesus can take out our *defiant nature* and replaces it with a *compliant nature* - one that loves God and loves people. If you're truly born of God you'll have His seed growing inside - which sprouts love and righteousness.

Jesus puts our lives on a overcoming trajectory.

Verse 10, "In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother." It's the believer's *manifest destiny* to *practice what's right* and to *love his brother*.

A few years ago I read of two women in Russia who swapped two year old toddlers. The hospital had sent the two women home with the wrong babies.

One mother was reminiscing, and looking over the memorabilia of her child's birth. She noticed another mother's name on her boy's maternity ward ID tag.

DNA tests confirmed the mistake.

And here John is saying that churches make the same mistake. We can send folks home thinking they're a child of God, when they're a child of the devil.

The only way to know for sure is a spiritual DNA test.

It doesn't matter what you do on the outside. You can be like the little old lady who drove the speed limit while she ran from the cops. On the outside you can do everything right. But if you don't stop for God in your heart, and surrender to His

authority over your life, you are lawless not righteous. *And you belong to the devil.*

If you're stubborn, and want it your way, and refuse to submit to God - then you've got a real problem. A true believer wants to *please God and love others.*

“For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another, not as Cain who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother's righteous.” Of all the roads that lead to hatred, jealousy is the shortest.

It was jealousy that turned Cain into a murderer. Its been said, **“A man green with envy is ripe for trouble.”**

That was certainly true in the case of Cain.

The story goes all the way back to Adam and Eve. In fact, *do you know what the first man and woman were doing after they sinned and got kicked out of the Garden of Eden?* Answer: **“They were raising Cain!”**

Cain was their first son. Their second was Abel. Abel understood there was nothing he could do to atone for his sin, so He obeyed God and brought Him a sacrifice.

But Cain was a proud man. He brought to God his crop - the work of his hands. Rather than offer what **God** wanted, Cain offered to God what **he** wanted.

God rejected Cain and accepted Abel.

Of course, this sent Cain into a rage. He was angry and frustrated - and took out his emotions on Abel.

Cain could've humbled himself and corrected his attitude, instead he attacked Abel and killed him.

Understand, *men of God* like Abel, are easy targets for people *mad at God*, like Cain. A man's arms are too short to box with God, so a man will take out his anger, and failure, and envy on God's representatives.

This is why John tells us not to be surprised by persecution. He says in verse 13, **"Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you..."** *Don't be shocked.*

John knows if the world hated Jesus it will hate us.

I like commentator John Phillips' thoughts on verse 13. **"Because the church followed its Founder, for its first three centuries it endured the full, fierce force of this world's hate. Nearly all of John's colleagues in the ministry had been persecuted and martyred."** John was well aware of the world's hostility toward Christianity.

For the first seven years of my daughter's education, Natalie attended a Christian school. But in the 8th grade we enrolled her in a public school. And I'll never forget our conversation. On the night before her first day, I told her... **"Natalie, I'll make you two promises..."**

First, you will be persecuted for being a Christian. I hope not often. I trust not by a teacher - but at some point it'll happen... Yet I also promise you that when it does happen Jesus will be there to give you strength!"

And I think Natalie would tell you I was right on both counts. *Don't be surprised when the world hates you.* Don't marvel, as if it was something you didn't expect.

Last week I mentioned in passing the ladies on the TV talk show, “[The View.](#)” I said, at the Lord’s coming when they get a *view* of the believers in Jesus standing next to Him, clothed in His glory, they’ll understand Christianity in a new light. Of course I was referencing comments by co-hosts, Joy Behar and Sunny Hostin.

On February 13 Hostin commented on the Christian faith of Vice President, Mike Pence, “[I don’t know that I want my vice president, um - speaking in tongues and having Jesus speak to him.](#)” Behar chimed in that “[hearing from Jesus is actually called ‘mental illness.’](#)”

If that’s the case, Pastor Sandy is the biggest crack-pot on the planet. I pray daily God will speak to me from His Word, and by His Spirit. *I’d imagine, you pray for God to speak to you as well. **And He does speak!***

For years I’ve prayed for politicians who hear from Jesus, so to see the answer to my prayer publicly ridiculed is astounding. The intolerance and scorn in this country toward Christianity and its values is growing at an alarming rate. I’m wondering what I’ll say to my granddaughter on her first day in public school...

But John says, “[do not marvel.](#)” Persecution is also our [manifest destiny](#). Live for Jesus and it’s inevitable.

Verse 14, “[We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren.](#)” Here’s the evidence of God’s life in a person’s heart - *it’s how you check for a spiritual pulse. Do we “[love the brethren.](#)”*

When you examine a Christian for spiritual life there are two **vital signs**: do they *do what's right and love the brethren*. Love and obedience are the indicators.

Shortly before his assassination, Martin Luther King Jr. spoke at Ebenezer Baptist Church here in Atlanta.

He was talking about what he wanted said at his funeral. "Tell them not to mention that I have a Nobel Peace Prize; that isn't important. Tell them not to mention I have three or four hundred other awards; that's not important... I'd like somebody to mention that day that Martin Luther King Jr. tried to love somebody."

This would've been John's heart as well. Love of the brethren was his claim to fame. *Do you love people?*

Verse 15, "He who does not love his brother abides in death. Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him." A professor at the University of Texas once asked his students if they'd ever seriously considered killing someone, *and if so did they have a plan to carry it out?*

He was shocked to discover 91% of the men, 84% of the women, said "yes" - *and had thought it through...*

One woman wrote of planning to invite her ex-boyfriend over for dinner; then stab him with a knife...

A man wrote of his road rage, and the day he pulled a baseball bat out of his trunk with the intention of beating a motorist, fortunately the guy ran for his life...

And yet this shouldn't surprise us. This is exactly what Jesus taught us in the Sermon on the Mount...

In Matthew 5:21-22 Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.' But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment."

Actual murder carries more serious consequences than mere anger, yet the *deed* is in the *seed*. Hatred and murder are the same evil, just different degrees.

Murder is anger that's run wild. It's uninhibited anger. Hate that has cast off all restraint. Thus, the person who hates has the potential for murder in his heart.

Of course, there's lots of talk these days about the plague of shootings we've seen in American schools.

Some folks are calling for gun control... Others talk about putting guns in the hands of faculty members...

But the Bible tells us the answer lies in our hearts!

I don't want to get into the politics of gun control. But I will say this, "I don't trust anyone who only talks of taking **guns out**, who doesn't talk of putting **God in**."

If you don't see the cavernous need in the heart of our youth for love and meaning - if you don't see how our disregard for life, the breakdown of the family, the absence of fathers, and the abandonment of our moral foundation has taken its toll - then you're not an honest and sincere thinker. You don't want to solve problems, you're only trying to move along a political agenda.

Ultimately the question is, **how can we change people's hearts?** And this is why our text today is so relevant. John is clear, the only answer is **Jesus!**

In Jesus *there is no sin* - He came into the world *to take away our sin* - and *destroy the works of the devil*.

Thus, when Jesus plants His seed and His Spirit in a our hearts it becomes that person's **manifest destiny** to change - *to do what's right and to love one another*.

Do you know Jesus? Are you on a trajectory toward victory?
You can be! You can come to Jesus today.