

# Jedediah Webb: Circuit Rider

## Chpt. 12

### November/December 1881

A baby changes everything in one's life. Willie Sue is a wonderful baby – happy, healthy, curious, and loving. Fortunately, we receive a lot of help from Angela's sisters, Ruth and Judith, who are growing into young women, ages 15 and 12 respectively. Angela is a tireless hero. She continues to serve the community with her doctor skills while serving as a full-time mother of a newborn. I often see Willie Sue enjoying rides in Angela's Doctor's Buggy as Angela makes calls to her patients' homes.

We receive lots of advice from friends and family on how to best raise Willie Sue. The greatest wisdom for raising children comes from God, Himself. The psalmist, King Solomon, wrote about the importance of God's involvement in building the life of one's family, home, or city, *"Unless the LORD builds the house, They labor in vain who build it; Unless the LORD guards the city, The watchman stays awake in vain"* (Psalm 127:1). Unless God is involved in helping us build our family, it is all done in vain. King Solomon also tells us that children are a reward from God, *"Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one's youth. Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them!"* (Psalm 127:3-5).

Children are a blessing from God to us, and God tells us that we must be a blessing to our children by teaching them to grow up with God, *"You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise"* (Deuteronomy 6:5–9). Angela and I are fully dedicated to teaching Willie Sue all about God's love and God's rules for life.

I am still recovering from my ankle injury. The wound from the arrowhead has healed, but I have developed a limp which I am afraid may last a while – if not a lifetime. It is hard to disguise the limp, but my vanity does its best to cover it up. I have developed the fine art of leaning on things and hiding the limp as I walk, but when I tire out, the ankle sometimes collapses. My brother, Jimmy, turned 21 years old this year, and he convinced Mother and Father that it is time that he moved out. My father gave him his blessing and my other brother Billy, age 16, stepped up to work the ranch. Jimmy has joined me in Coleman, and he is a great help to me as I continue to work on my house on the outskirts of town. He is also building his own home on a plot just down the road from my place. He is happy to build a sod dugout to begin with. He says that he will build a better house once he has a bride to share it with.

I am blessed to be joined by both of my preacher friends, Jeremiah and Paul, on the circuit for the “Thanksgiving and Christmas Run.” They insisted that they wanted to experience the joys of the holidays with me. I suspect that they really want to watch over me as I continue to heal. I am grateful to have friends like these two. We all shared in the preaching at each community on the circuit. We each had a message to bring about the joys of celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ. This year, we focused on “Celebrating Christmas in Our New Life in Christ.”

As new Christians, we can fully celebrate Jesus because God sent Him to save us, *“But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. Much more surely, therefore, since we have now been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God” (Romans 5:8-9).* As new Christians, we now have a new life, *“Do you not know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we were buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:3-4).* Since we have a new life, we now behave differently...more loving, kind, forgiving, and righteous. Paul tells us we are now changed, and we are obliged to behave differently, *“No longer present your members (bodies) to sin as instruments of unrighteousness but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life and present your members (bodies) to*



*God as instruments of righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace" (Romans 6:13-14).*

In spite of all the help from Jeremiah and Paul, this has been a hard circuit ride for me. I find that being away from home is very difficult. Not seeing Willie Sue on a daily basis is wearing on me. The frigid temperatures and lack of rain don't help either. The cold air aggravates my ankle. Our area of Texas is under drought conditions. It has not rained since July. Due to the harsh conditions, animals on the trail are particularly difficult. They are hungry, and hunger can drive animals to be more aggressive than usual. Hustler guards us from the wild animals who would want to eat us: coyotes, mountain lions, wolves, and even a few bears. Mangy critters like skunks, foxes, and racoons can be more of a nuisance when they are constantly searching for food. Hustler catches these nuisance critters and brings them to us for dinner. We praise him, but we pass on the meals he offers.

### **Spring 1882**

It is now spring, and the rain has come - too much rain. All of the rivers are swollen and dangerous to cross. There is much flooding as the dry, cracked ground cannot soak up the water fast enough. There is much run-off and flooding occurs in the most unlikely places. Rahab is a trooper as she patiently slogs through the cold mud and water. It seems that she is as dedicated to serving the people as I am. In spite of the rain, the circuit must go on. Everyone wants to meet Willie Sue and see Angela again, so I promise them that I will bring them all this summer or next fall.

Once again, I petitioned the Episcopal Methodist Northwest Texas Conference for approval as the full-time pastor of the Coleman Episcopal Methodist Church. I do not mention this, but I am secretly considering leaving the conference if my wish is not granted. I love the people on my circuit, but I am also privately driven to desire one church in one community where I can truly lay down meaningful roots and serve everyone full-time. Patiently waiting for someone afar, who really doesn't know me, to decide upon my fate is difficult; but this is the system of the Methodist Church. All

preachers are itinerant, and preaching assignments are at the mercy of the bishop and his cabinet.

### **Fall 1882**

This October Willie Sue turned one year old. She is now considered old enough to travel, so she and Angela accompanied me on this run of the circuit. Everyone was delighted to meet Willie Sue, and Willie Sue took delight in meeting and entertaining strangers! Angela took care of everyone's medical needs as best she could. In Turkey Creek, I conducted a funeral for a 9-month-old child. Angela was hit hard by this loss. Each time someone loses a child, I suspect that the people around wonder how they would react to the loss of their own child. Knowing that one's child is safe in Jesus' arms should help sooth one's own soul, but we are human. We love and we grieve with equal passion.

My sermon for this round on the circuit was titled, "Satan Hates God." I want people to understand how much Satan hates God, and he knows that he will never defeat God. His only success is when he turns people away from God's love and grace. In the Book of Revelation, God tells us how Satan fell from grace, *"And war broke out in heaven; Michael and his angels fought against the dragon. The dragon and his angels fought back, but they were defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. The great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him"* (Revelation 12:7-9). Paul tells us that we have only two choices...to follow God or Satan, *"Do you not know that, if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God that you who were slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart... and have become enslaved to righteousness"* (Romans 6:16-18). When we refuse God (and life), we accept Satan (and death). There is no middle ground.



At each stop along the circuit, the people always welcomed us with open arms and accepted my family as their family. Each community asked me to move to their town and become their full-time pastor. I humbly thanked each one for their offer, but explained that when the time comes, I will be looking to remain in Coleman where my home and family have been established. It breaks my heart to do so, but I must go with my gut feelings that I am called to minister to the Coleman community. I continue to vigorously implore the Holy Spirit to continue to speak to me about the specifics of God's calling.

### **December 1882**

Drought is bad. Wildfires are worse. Wildfires are life-endangering events for preachers on the trail that people don't normally consider. I learned the hard way exactly how close one can come to being burned alive on the preaching circuit. After I concluded some church business in Buffalo Gap, I decided not to continue on my circuit to Abilene because some wildfires had been spotted north and west of Abilene. Although there were good rains in the spring, the summer and fall were dry. That day, the winds were light and blowing in a northeasterly direction, so the fires were not deemed to be an immediate danger. However, I decided to be cautious and not take a chance to travel north; therefore, I headed south back to Coleman. I took a different route rather than the usual trail which headed directly south, and I angled southeast to get further away from the faint whiff of smoke. This route is quicker to Coleman, but it is less populated and consists of heavier brush.

As I travelled, the smell of smoke grew stronger, and I could tell the wind direction had changed to a southerly direction, and by judging the bend on the Mesquite trees, the wind was a good 30 miles per hour in speed or higher. About 10 miles out of Coleman, I heard the crackling of the fire and the roar of the wind coming up fast behind me. I knew I was in trouble. There was no way to outrun the fire, but Rahab would have a chance to escape if I let her go on alone. Jim Ned Creek was just ahead. I prayed that it contained enough water. There was. I grabbed a blanket and soaked it in the water. I swatted Rahab on the rump and told her to go. She looked at me in hesitation, but I

could see the terror in her eyes. She looked at me and gave me a long farewell with those beautiful eyes of hers. With tears in my eyes and a choke in my throat I yelled at her to go. I swatted her again and she ran south.

I laid myself down in the creek and covered myself with the blanket I had soaked in water. I asked God to protect me and Rahab both. I couldn't help but wonder if God was thinking, "Here he goes again, risking his life." As I lay there, I thanked God for the good life of which He blessed me, and I asked Him to protect my family and friends in Coleman from the fire headed their way. Although I was terrified of burning to death, I was calm in knowing that I would soon be in the loving hands of Jesus.

The fire roared over the creek, and I could hear the crackling of the firestorm. Suddenly, I heard a great wind – much louder than the wind I'd heard before. The wind was so loud, I knew something different was happening. Foolishly, I peeked out from under the blanket to see what was going on. My eyes were immediately irritated with smoke, but I could see that the wind had changed. It was now blowing from the east...which is relatively unheard of this time of year. The wind had carried the fire away from the creek and back to the previously burned area. With that, the fire immediately subsided. Not only that but the huge wind was now only showing a trickle of speed. The fire was all but gone.

I sat up in wonder. God had surely created this miracle! As I sat there waist deep in the water, I saw a man and a boy standing on a rise about one hundred feet away. Without a word, they were both pointing to the south. I got up and called out to them, but they had disappeared from my view. I stumbled to my feet and began to walk in the direction they had pointed out to me. Perhaps they were leading me to their cabin. I walked for what seemed like hours, and several times I saw the young boy up ahead pointing the way. Near total exhaustion, I wondered, "Who are these people? Are they real? Could these be some angels leading me home?" I wanted to lie down and sleep, but I knew people would be worried, so I trudged on.

When I saw the boy for the last time, he was smiling and still pointing toward the south. This time, he simply said, "Home." I walked toward him to thank him, but he was gone again. I heard the whinny of a horse. I looked up and there was Paul on his horse



looking at me. He said, "It's good to see you on your feet. We were all worried about you when Rahab came home alone. They sent me out to find you...or your body, anyway." I told him about the fire, and he said, "Well, no wonder Rahab's trail was all over the place. Her tracks indicated that she was under some kind of trauma. The tracks were so jumbled that I am surprised I was able to track back to you." I told him about the angels who led me out. "Yes, I see that. I too believe that I was led to you by the Holy Spirit or angels or maybe even one of my ancient Comanche gods." He looked at me to see if that would get a rise out of me, but I was too tired to care.

Once home, I received hugs from everyone to the point where I was sore all over. Angela cried so much that Willie Sue soon joined in. I told everyone the story of the fire, the huge gust that blew out the fire, and the angels who led me home. I am here to tell you that this experience reinforced to me that one should talk to God all of the time throughout every day and trust Him, *"Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to Him, and He will make your paths straight"* (Proverbs 3:5-6). I took some sweet treats out to Rahab and rubbed her for the longest time. I apologized to her for leading her into harm's way yet again. I am glad that I had not brought Hustler with me this trip. He most likely would have refused to leave me.

### **Spring 1883**

As spring approached, I was informed that again I had been assigned by the Methodist Conference to the Brownwood/Abilene Circuit because there was still a need for circuit riders for some small communities; however, Abilene and Brownwood were removed from my circuit as they now had full-time pastors. I was sad to see those towns removed from the circuit but also happy that those communities now had a full-time spiritual leader. In May, Jimmy and I finished my house, and we continue to work at Jimmy's house on his acreage. Jimmy has eyes on Angela's sister, Ruth (now age 17). I hope he realizes that if he marries Ruth, he will have to obey Angela as well.

## Summer 1884

In July, I took a break from the circuit. I was thoroughly enjoying spending time with Willie Sue and getting to know her much better. As what usually happens in the summer, I was approached by my good friend, Texas Ranger Henry Armstrong. Henry said he had a job for me as the Ranger Chaplain, but first he wanted me to meet someone. He introduced me to Matías Ruiz Castillo, a Vaquero from a ranch in Garza Galán Mexico across the border from the Texas town of San Felipe del Rio. He was traveling north with a few of his men to recover some stolen stock - horses and cattle - from a band of Apache braves. Chief Geronimo had led his people on breakouts from the reservation in New Mexico so that they could make raids on American and Mexican ranches. They had been caught by the U.S. Army over and over again and returned to the reservation only for them to break out again. This time they had hit Matías' ranch just south of the border, and they were most likely headed to West Texas. Matías had lost the trail west of Coleman, and they were asking for help. Henry wanted Paul and I to accompany them as they hunted down the raiders. I talked to Angela, and she encouraged me to go because we needed the money, but she insisted that I come back to her in one piece. I agreed...after all what could possibly go wrong?

I had heard of the famed Vaqueros south of the border, but I had never met one personally. Vaqueros are widely known and revered for their riding and lassoing skills, and as expert cattlemen. Matías was wearing a very ornate outfit to say the least. He had a colorful high peaked hat, a neatly starched checkered shirt, tight leather pants with fancy furry chaps, shiny black boots, and a red sash. His horse was decked out in an ornately carved leather saddle and riding gear. He looked like he was ready to ride in a parade – not to go hunting for thieves on a dusty trail.

Henry had recruited 12 men, 6 of whom were Rangers, and we left early the next morning. Paul quickly picked up the band's trail even though the Apache are experts at confusing trackers, and we headed northwest. I enjoyed talking with Matías on the trail. We could communicate fairly easily because cattle people work together and share their languages and cultures with one another. I could speak a little Spanish and Matías could speak a little English. It was an interesting mixture of languages as we shared our



thoughts and lives with one another. We hit it off quite well, and I could sense a strong friendship in the making. However, because of his fancy get up, I was suspicious of his abilities as a cattleman.

Two days in, Henry informed us that the Apache band and the stock had been spotted, and the time for confrontation was near. Apparently Geronimo was not leading this band, but one of his second-in-command chiefs, Nahche, was in charge of about 8-10 warriors. The plan was to surround them at night and take them by surprise in early morning. We did not think that we had been spotted, but we observed the band for two days to see if they were aware of our presence. They showed no signs of taking caution. Actually, they seemed to be celebrating their ill-gotten gains with constant feasting.

Henry warned us that a common tactic of the Apache was to act unaware and set ambushes for pursuers. We were cautioned to be wary. We waited until early morning to confront the warrior band. As the Rangers closed in, my job was to stay to the rear and render aid to anyone who got injured. With my ankle the way it was, I was glad to be on Rahab in the rear of the action. Just as daylight broke, the Ranger band rode into the Apache camp. Surprisingly enough, the Apache warriors were taken completely by surprise. They were not aware of our pursuit. They were not prepared to defend themselves. Several of them jumped on their horses and scattered. A few were seeking their weapons, but Matías rode in and lassoed three braves and hogtied them before they were even fully awake. I was amazed at his speed and his accuracy. After Matías' roping exhibition, there was not much left to be done. Several other braves, including Chief Nahche, mounted and headed west. The Rangers and the Vaqueros did not bother to pursue them as the horses and cattle had been recovered. No one was injured, and three braves were captured.

I sat on Rahab in wonder of how easy this whole scene took place. I was suddenly jumped by an Apache brave. He grabbed my bad ankle and pulled me off of Rahab. The pain in my ankle was so great I nearly blacked out. The Apache brave brandished a knife as he apparently intended to kill me quietly before he made his escape. We struggled for a few moments, and I knew that I was a goner. Suddenly, I

heard a shot from afar, and the Apache brave twisted fully around and fell flat on his face. I looked up and saw Henry with his trusty rifle pointed in my direction. Henry had made that shot from at least 200 feet away and hit a moving target right on the head. It would have been a miracle shot for me to have done, but I guess it was just routine for Henry. I limped over to Henry and thanked him for saving my life once again. He just smiled and said, "That's just what friends do for each other."

Once we got back to Coleman, I fessed up to Angela about how close I came to death. I told her that I was done with anymore "Ranger trips." She looked at me and said, "You are no more done with the Rangers than you are done with breathing. Just continue to be careful and not take unnecessary chances." I couldn't help but wonder what I had done to deserve such a loving and understanding woman. She understands that I must do whatever it takes in order to make this world safe for my loved ones.

### **Fall 1883**

This October Willie Sue turned 2 years old, and Angela announced that she is pregnant and probably due next April. This is great news, and it added more urgency to my desire to get that full-time assignment to Coleman. I again petitioned the conference to assign me to Coleman only. In my mind I had decided that I would leave the conference if they turned me down one more time. I didn't know this, but the leadership team of the Coleman Methodist Church also petitioned the conference leaders to assign me full-time. They even mildly threatened to leave the conference if their request is turned down for a third time.

### **December 1883**

Good news at last. The Methodist Conference has consented to assign me to Coleman as their full-time pastor. My assignment from them is to run the circuit one last time this next spring and to help acclimate the new circuit rider to the remaining communities on the circuit, now known as the Copperas Creek/Bufalo Gap Circuit. I



met the new preacher, Jessie Blackstone, and spoke to him about the circuit which now included Copperas Creek, Turkey Creek, Clyde, Vickory, and Buffalo Gap. It is now a tight circuit of about 120 miles roundtrip which mainly runs east-west. He could decide where to make his homebase, but I suggested he look into Clyde as it is centralized and has recently been added to the east- west railroad route. Jessie is 25 years old, unmarried and anxious to get started with his calling. He reminds me of myself 8 years ago when I was starting a circuit at the age of 24. I am now almost 33 years old which means I bested the 30-year-old mark where most circuit riders are either dead or retired. Jessie agreed to accompany me on the circuit route in February and March.

### **February/March 1884**

It is time for me to say farewell to the communities on my circuit. Angela wishes to go, but she is far too pregnant to make that trip. She will have to make her visits after the second baby is born. I am sure everyone wants to meet him or her. I have two goals for this trip. First to introduce their new preacher to them and second to give a goodbye sermon. I decided to give them "Good News, Better News, and Best News" as my parting sermon. At each stop after introducing the new pastor and giving him an opportunity to speak, I stood and gave them these words:.

"Friends, thank you for allowing me to be your pastor for the last five years. It has been my pleasure to serve you. It is with heavy heart that I leave you, but change is inevitable in this life, but one thing never changes....God's love for you. His love has been with you and always will be with you. You see, God brings us good news, better news, and best news. The good news is that we are now living in the spirit of God and no longer in the sinful flesh. As Paul tells us, *"But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, then the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness"* (Romans 8:9-10). Now that we are living in the Spirit of God, we no longer fear death because we have eternal life given to us through the death of our savior Jesus Christ.

The even better news is that God guards over us and operates for our best in our everyday lives. Paul tells us, *"We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose"* (Romans 8:28). When we turn our lives over to God, He ensures that we get what is best for us. He knows us better than we know ourselves and He works for the best of all things in our lives. We have to trust God through good times and bad, through joy and heartache, through success and failure. He is with us every minute of every day.

The best news is that God is all powerful and He is on our side. Paul tells us, *"What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us?"* (Romans 8:31). Paul goes on to assure us that nothing can separate us from God, *"For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."* (Romans 8:38-39). God is with us through all of the changes in our lives. Our circumstances may change, but God's love is steadfast and unchangeable!

I am grateful to say that the communities accepted Jessie with open arms and some are already trying to match him up with their daughters. I forgot to warn him about that. I am sure we will have many discussions in the future about what to expect on a preaching circuit.

### **April 1884**

As predicted, our second baby arrived in April. We decided to name him after someone who has saved my life numerous times, so say hello to our son....

Henry Augustus Webb

### **Summer 1884**

My new life as the full-time preacher at Coleman Episcopal Methodist Church has begun. Angela and I and our two children have moved into our new home on our



acreage on the edge of town. Rahab, Sadie, Buster, and Hustler will have to get accustomed to life on a ranch rather than on the trail. I am settling in as a locally assigned preacher. It is different attending to only one community at a time. It seems I can accomplish so much more for my parishioners since I do not spend many hours in the saddle. I still hold onto my desire to ensure justice for our community, so I am really interested in continuing to serve as Chaplain in the Texas Rangers.

One day, I will take the time to tell you about the adventures of my family and friends: Paul and his wife, Angel, and their children Talako (age 15) and Tanis (age 13); Jeremiah and his wife, Rachel, and their children Isaac (age 23), David (age 18), Esther (age 21) and Elizabeth (age 16); Texas Ranger Henry; and my newest friend Matías Ruiz Castillo, a Vaquero from his ranch in Garza Galán Mexico. They are all amazing people, and they have wonderful stories of their own. For now, all is well with my soul. God is great and God is good. I thank God for protecting me all of those years on the circuit, and I look forward to his continued love and protection as I serve the community of Coleman, Texas.

Matt Stephen

November 2024

**Thank you for following Jedediah Webb's life as he rode the preaching circuits in Texas. Jed has settled down as pastor of Coleman Episcopal Methodist Church. This chapter ends part I of Jedediah's story. Although he is no longer riding a circuit, his preaching and law enforcement adventures are far from over.**

**Please stay tuned on [mattstephen.com](http://mattstephen.com). Early next year, I plan to begin posting chapters for Part II of Jed's story -**

**Jedediah Webb: Frontier Pastor**

Thank you.