

Part II

Jedediah Webb: Frontier Pastor

Chpt. 13

Fall 1884

I must admit that life for me is different in many ways now that I am no longer riding a circuit for the Methodist Episcopal Church. Life as a frontier pastor assigned to one Methodist church in one community and practicing the life of a full-time family man offers me opportunities to strengthen relationships with those people closest to me. I have more time to devote to my parishioners in Coleman. On the circuit in a two-week period, I could travel 200 miles, deliver 10-12 sermons a week, and spend 60 hours in the saddle. I spend much less time on the road now, and I am more able to devote myself to the needs of a single community. With all of that said, I must admit I miss the people I had grown to love on the circuit. To maintain contact with them, I take the time to write letters and read their local newspapers. I am often requested to make visits to take care of some needs in the communities of my two previous circuits, but I encourage them to rely upon their new pastors for support. Curtailing ties is very difficult for past preachers but necessary in order to help the new preachers assigned to the churches.

Willie Sue and Henry Augustus are growing up fast, and I am able to spend more time being an attentive father to them. Willie Sue is somewhat of a tomboy, and Angela says this is my fault. In my defense, I just let Willie Sue do what she wants to do. She is 3 years old, and she wants to follow me around and help with the chores on our ranch. Her favorite chore is feeding the chickens, and she enjoys them chasing her as she spreads their feed. Willie Sue is also interested in helping with the many duties of maintaining a church such as straightening song books and cushions on the pews, picking trash up from the floors, trimming candles, and bringing in wood for the stoves. It amazes me what all she is able to do. Henry Augustus (5 months old) is a good baby,

and he wants to spend all of his time with his mother. Angela leaves him with me or her sisters when she tends to her doctoring duties, but Henry won't stand for her being gone from him long. He lets us know his discontent by showing off his healthy lungs by bellowing loud and long. For multiple reasons, it is always good to see Angela walking through the door.

It is nice to focus entirely on one church. The church leadership team decided it was time to add on to the church building. Mostly constructed of clay brick, our church building is quite small. The sanctuary is approximately 800 square feet. They decided to order lumber from East Texas and build a larger sanctuary to suit the needs of a larger growing congregation which now numbers 150 souls. We know that one day soon, we will need to order kiln-fired brick from Fort Worth and build a lasting brick structure to serve future generations. The leadership team assigned a committee to oversee the planning and construction of the new addition. The goal was established to finish the new sanctuary by September of next year. Little did I know how much time I would spend working with this committee on decision-making. Each person has his/her own ideas about how a sanctuary should look and function, and emotions run high when someone disagrees.

Texas Ranger Henry Armstrong has taken interest in some of the young women in Coleman. He is a very handsome man with a reputation for bravery and daring. The girls consider him a real prize, and some are willing to fight for him. Henry likes to spend time with many of them which prompted me to give him a warning, "Henry, you need to be careful. Seeing multiple women at the same time is dangerous. Calling on more than one woman might be construed as being untrue. You might not consider any of these women to be your soul mate, but they might see themselves as tied to you. Some might even consider your seeing other women as adultery. You want to avoid hurting any of these young women. If you make an enemy of them, you also make enemies of their families. I speak from experience." Henry thanked me for my advice, but I could see in his eyes that he felt he could handle these women just fine. I hope one day that I don't have to carve on his headstone, "He should have listened to me."

Henry is enjoying the women, but his biggest interest is fulfilling his job as a Texas Ranger. He has been assigned to help Coleman County Sheriff Bill Price to put a stop to vigilante activities. A lot of men have been found hanging from trees with signs on them identifying them as bandits, horse thieves, cattle rustlers, fence cutters, sheep herders, violators of women, and other unsavory things. Some men have also been found shot full of holes and buried in shallow graves. We have run across men buried so hastily that body parts are sticking up out of the ground. These immediate and biased consequences have put fear into the entire community that even innocent people can be hanged at a moment's notice at the will of a vigilante gang. I am reminded of the problem in Erath County near Dublin where my mother and father live. It took some time, but the vigilantes were eventually converted or buried by the authorities.

Henry has asked for my help in stopping vigilantes in the Coleman area, and I will be glad to do so. When we confront vigilantes, my message to them will be the same as the Apostle Paul tells us, *"Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord'"* (**Romans 12:19**). We can leave judgment and punishment up to God. One day each one of us will face consequences for our actions here on Earth. There is no way to escape judgment. As Paul tells us, *"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil"* (**2 Corinthians 5:10**). If vigilantes choose to murder others hopefully they will one day face judgment by the local authorities; but assuredly they will one day face God's judgment for murder.

Our world is filled with people who have given themselves over to evil. Some have chosen to walk the dark road, and they are dedicated to following the evil one forever. For those people we can do nothing other than to pray that they will somehow turn toward the light of God. There is the good news for those of us who give our lives over to Jesus Christ. Paul tells us, *"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus"* (**Romans 8:1**). As followers of Christ, we can live our lives according to God's plan and be models for others to follow, so they too will follow us into a perfect eternity.

I must say that Angela continues to be an awesome devoted mother and doctor. She finds a way to treat everyone who needs medical attention in spite of being a full-time mother. We finally bought her that Doctor's Buggy she has been wanting. This allows her to make more home visits. It surprises me how many people in the area cannot get to town in order to seek medical treatment. Some people are bedridden, some are too weak and unstable to travel, or some do not have a means of transportation and have no nearby neighbors to help them out. When Angela is called away on a moment's notice, I watch the children. If she knows ahead of time she will be spending the day on the road, we call in her sisters for help. I like to accompany Angela on the road to protect her. Also, I like to help with emotional and spiritual healing where needed. The Holy Spirit can do wonders for those who are hurting and running low on hope. God tells us that it is our job here on Earth to comfort others. As the Apostle Paul tells us, *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God"* (2 Corinthians 1:3-4).

This fall, there is an onset of a possible epidemic in our community. Angela and Angel (Paul's wife) are fighting a disease known as Measles. It is a highly contagious disease that is spread through a virus. There is no cure or vaccination against it, so the best way to treat it is through isolation, methods to reduce fever, and intake of plenty of fluids. Symptoms of Measles are runny nose, coughing, watery eyes, small white spots in the mouth, a red blotchy rash that can spread throughout the body, diarrhea, fever, and sore throat. Although the symptoms can become severe, it rarely leads to death.

The scary thing about measles is that it closely resembles Smallpox – a vicious disease that has run its course in America and killed hundreds of thousands of people over time. The symptoms are much the same as Measles but can also include back pain, convulsions, severe breathing issues, and can be quite deadly. A vaccination has been created for Smallpox and Angela has seen to it that many in the community have received that vaccination in order to prevent an outbreak of this terrible disease. Many people fear that vaccinations actually introduce the disease itself into their bodies;

therefore, they have refused the vaccine. In fact, some folks are now panicking because they believe Smallpox has arrived in Coleman. Some are convinced that it may bring on the "End of Times." Some talk of burning the houses of those who have contracted the disease and isolate the sick into tents far outside of town. Angela has done her best to soothe those fears by emphasizing that it is Measles and not Smallpox, but they do not believe her.

This is where I can come in to help. I pulled the community together and explained to them that God has given humankind a good brain in order to handle situations like this. God has provided us with the tools and the ability to diagnose and cure illnesses. Along with this, we should pray to God for His healing power and seek His guidance on how to handle diseases as they accost our community. James, brother of Jesus, tells us how to help the sick, *"Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven"* (James 5:14-15).

I told the community members that Angela, Angel, and their helpers would administer medical attention while the rest of us attend to the praying and anointing for those who are ill. The sheriff assigned some deputies to help keep the impulsive actions of the townspeople under control. He did not allow anyone to be run out of town. Neither did he allow any burning of houses or property to take place. Several of the churches joined in and supplied lay leaders to minister to everyone's emotions. The fact that no one was dying from the disease certainly helped calm people's frayed nerves.

Angela's family is doing well. Her mother Saphronia is happily married to Clarence Goodman, and Angela's sisters are growing into adulthood. Judith, age 15, is a little wild and fancy-free and needs to be watched. Ruth, who has turned 18, is more emotionally mature, and she is seeing my brother, Jimmy. They are getting serious enough that Jimmy has asked Saphronia for permission to marry Ruth. Permission was granted and an engagement party was held. Angela organized the party and the whole town was invited. I pulled the two lovers aside and told them that I would preside over the wedding if okay with them. They both readily agreed. With that, we scheduled some

marriage counseling sessions for them to attend. I will get some help from some of the successfully married couples in the church to give sage advice about how to succeed in married life. I will emphasize that building a marriage on the solid foundation of Jesus Christ is the only way to go. If both husband and wife are following God's laws and walking towards God in life, they will also walk closer to one another.

My friend, Jeremiah Anderson, has finished much of his theological schooling, and is riding a circuit for the AME (African Methodist Episcopal Church). His wife, Rachel, now has a teaching certificate and is teaching at Coleman School. Their son, Isaac, age 23, has a blacksmith business in town. David, age 18, is riding the circuit with his father and following the call from God to be a preacher. Daughter Esther, age 21, is married with a child on the way, and Jeremiah is wildly anticipating becoming a grandpa early next year. Daughter Elizabeth, age 16, is beautiful inside and out and has many boys following her around. This has caused some concern among the families of the Caucasian boys. In fact, Elizabeth has been approached by some of those boys' parents and friends. Some have made threats to her and her family if she doesn't stay away from them.

Elizabeth is innocent of trying to entice boys of any color. She honestly does not show any interest in being romanced by any boy. She is interested in painting, sculpting, singing, and acting on stage. Jeremiah and I have spoken to these families, and it appears we have calmed their fears of interracial dating. Some of the boys have taken to chastising Elizabeth through name calling and spreading rumors about her morality. A few of the boys follow her around and threaten her, "You ain't good enough to be with a White boy anyway. Someday your uppity self will be in real trouble. Just you wait." Jeremiah is quite unsettled over these threats, and he restrains himself from confronting the boys. As the local preacher, I have spelled out to these boys what God and the local law will do to them if they don't leave Elizabeth alone. I hope that my stern warning will help keep the peace.

Someday I hope that humankind can become color blind and unbiased as to color of skin and different cultures and backgrounds. Jesus tells us to love our neighbors when He is asked which of God's commandments is the greatest, "*Teacher,*

which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"

(Matthew 22:36-39). To answer the question of "Who is my neighbor?," Jesus tells a story about the Good Samaritan in **Luke 10:25-37**. In this story, he describes to us that our neighbors are everyone on this planet no matter how different they are from us.

Paul Hunter, my Comanche friend, still struggles with totally releasing the gods of his people in favor of Jesus Christ. He is determined to follow Christ but is reluctant to give up the gods with whom he grew up. I continue to emphasize to Paul that God is a jealous God and will not tolerate our worshipping of any other god. In fact the only way for anyone to get to heaven and be with God forever, is to accept Jesus Christ's gift of dying in our place so our sins could be forgiven. Jesus tells us that He is the only way to heaven, *"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me"* **(John 14:6)**. God tells us that we are not to worship anything or anyone other than Him. In fact, no one or nothing can get us to heaven other than Jesus. Paul has a hard time embracing this due to his upbringing in Comanche society. I understand this because many people in this world do not and will not accept God's word that only through Jesus can one enter heaven.

Paul's wife, Angel, is working on a medical certification through her apprenticeship with Angela. She continues to hold onto the medical practices of her culture and shares them with Angela and her patients. Paul's son Talako rides for local ranchers as well as his father. He is probably the most proficient cowboy in the area. Daughter Tanis is a waitress and singer at the local restaurant. She and Jeremiah's daughter, Elizabeth, have become best friends; and they are both interested in working on the entertainment stage one day.

Matías Ruiz Castillo, my Vaquero friend from Mexico, spends time with me in Coleman. He has purchased some land east of Coleman and plans to start a ranch to support his father's cattle business down in Mexico. He plans to build a house, barns, and corrals on his land along with vast holding pens to help facilitate the movement of cattle from Mexico to some train stations up north. Matías is not married, so he is

bringing some of his family to live with him here in Texas: his sisters Victoria and Sofia and his brothers Luis, Alejandro, and Santiago. I am grateful to be learning more about the Mexican culture as it truly is a big part of making Texas the great state that it is. Matías and I are quickly becoming good friends. He stays with me on my ranch, and he is teaching me the finer arts of roping and horse handling. I believe that Paul's son, Talako, has some serious competition when it comes to Matías. They are both excellent horsemen and cattle drivers.

Life sometimes takes some interesting turns. Just as I thought that life in Coleman was going quite smoothly, some strangers made their way to town. A tonic peddler by the name of Finn Magee, his wife Zara, and his family rolled into town and introduced themselves to me and some of the town leaders. They sought permission to pitch their camp on the outskirts of town and conduct business for a few weeks. Finn had a powerful tonic to sell - cures everything from heart attacks to hangnails. Madam Zara, as she called herself, tells people's fortunes and consults with the mystic universe for answers to people's questions. They received permission from the town leaders to set up camp for two weeks. The mayor, Jonas Wellmann, told them, "We know enough about Gypsies to tell you that you must obey the laws here or you will be run off. We do not tolerate lying, cheating, stealing, licentiousness, debauchery, or any kind of illegal or immoral actions from strangers." I couldn't help but wonder if he meant these actions are okay for townsfolk but not for strangers.

Angela and I realized that these two should have the freedom to conduct business as long as no one is harmed by their actions. Angela was not happy with the decision of the town leaders because she has seen people take tonics that are useless in curing ailments or can even be harmful to their bodies. I was not happy because Madam Zara is a necromancer – a person who speaks to the dead. God tells us to stay away from mediums and those who claim to speak with the dead, *"Do not turn to mediums or necromancers; do not seek them out and so make yourselves unclean by them: I am the Lord your God"* (Deuteronomy 18:9-12). God wants us to depend upon Him for guidance.

Furthermore, in the parable of "The Rich Man and Lazarus" Jesus tells us that the dead are not allowed to speak to the living. When the rich man died and found himself in torment in Hades, he begged to be allowed to warn his family of the dire consequences of living in darkness. He was told, "[They have Moses and the prophets; let them listen to them...If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead](#)" (**Luke 16:29-31**). I felt the need to warn people that God forbids us from dabbling in the occult.

Sure enough after a couple of days we began to hear from the townspeople. They came by the dozens to me with concerns about Finn and Madam Zara. Some described side effects of the elixir: headaches, diarrhea, stomach aches, and even fever. Several were frightened about Madam Zara's predictions which she claimed she was hearing from their dead ancestors. One woman even refused to leave her house because of a dire prediction of her immediate upcoming death. Some were overjoyed with predictions for their futures, and in gratitude they gave large donations to Madam Zara. Several people expressed concern about the intimidation they felt from Zara's family who requested that they give generous donations. Some people began to show up at the Sheriff's office with complaints about thieves taking property and livestock from their homes at night. They suspected the Gypsy family was responsible for their missing property.

Angela was livid over the fact that some of her patients were refusing medical treatment because Finn says, "This magic elixir from God is all you need to cure your ailments." She was ready to ride over to the Gypsy camp and run everyone out of the county. I could see blood in her eyes, and I could tell that she was ready to dispense immediate justice no matter what the cost. I told her to wait for me and Sheriff Price to go along to make sure this is taken care of legally and non-lethally. She didn't appreciate me kidding her like that.

Later that day, Sheriff Price, Angela, and I rode out to meet with Finn, Madam Zara and their family members at their campsite. We were welcomed into camp by Finn, but I noticed that several of the family members were standing close to their weapons. We explained what the townspeople had reported to us. Sheriff Price told the family they

have 24 hours to pack up and leave the county. He asked if they knew anything about stolen property in the area, and they denied knowing anything. Sheriff Price then began to look around the camp for stolen items.

Angela told Finn, "If people are physically hurt from your fake elixir, you will face me and the authorities. If even one person is hurt by taking your fake elixir 'from God,' we will track you down and you will face charges for assault or possibly murder. You will face the consequences of our laws, and once you face God, you will be subject to His judgment for eternity. God tells us on the day of judgment the righteous will be given mercy, but those who walk in darkness will suffer for eternity, *"But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death"* (Revelation 21:8).

I channeled the "Willie" inside of me and threatened Madam Zara, "You're acting as though you have been given the power of prophecy and wisdom from God. This is false, and you know it. You will one day face the wrath of God for misleading His children. Before that, however, you will face the wrath of the local authorities for misleading the people of Coleman. You have chosen to walk a dark path as you deceive and hurt others. You are guilty of much of what God hates, and you will one day face His wrath, *"There are six things that the Lord hates, seven that are an abomination to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that make haste to run to evil, a false witness who breathes out lies, and one who sows discord among brothers"* (Proverbs 6:16-19).

As I finished these words, a rather large, muscular man approached us with a large club. He said, "The Sheriff is out of sight, and you are all alone. I don't like the way you 'uppity' people are talking to my family. Let's see how tough you are." Before he finished that last sentence, he was rushing straight at me swinging the club. He wasn't very smart because just as he reached me, he had finished his initial swing, and the club was behind him. My training from Henry and Paul set in, and I used his own momentum to keep him spinning around as I grabbed his right arm and shoulder, twisted them, and took him face down to the ground. He yelped in pain as I wrenched

his arm and kneeled upon it. He was trapped. If he were to try and get up, he would break his own arm. Just then, Sheriff Price ran up with his gun drawn. "I changed my mind," he said, "You have one hour to break camp and get moving."

The gypsy clan made haste to leave town. Sheriff Price said he did not find any stolen goods in the camp, so Henry called in some Ranger friends to help him trail the Gypsy family. He was determined to see if they would lead him to a cache of stolen goods if there was one. Sure enough there was, and Henry made some arrests and returned stolen property to Coleman residents. This incident further emphasized to me what Jesus meant when he told religious leaders to be shepherds to His children. Jesus tells us, *"I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me - just as the Father knows me and I know the Father - and I lay down my life for the sheep"* (John 10:14-15). We, like Jesus, are to do whatever it takes to guide and protect our flocks of people just as shepherds guide and protect their flocks of sheep.

Peace has returned to Coleman with the Gypsies leaving town. Angela and Angel have a good grip on the Measles outbreak. People are recovering in time with very little spreading of the virus occurring. The plans for the new addition to the church are going well, and construction materials are rolling in. Harmony reigns among the members of the Methodist congregation, and the community of Coleman is engaged in a Fall Festival celebration complete with food, music, fun and friends. All is well, and we praise God for His blessings on our entire community.

I welcomed the peace, so now I could get some paperwork done for the Methodist conference and attend to planning out my sermons for the next few months. As always, just as things appear orderly and calm in my life, Henry comes looking for me with an assignment for me to help him apply justice to this world.

Henry asked me, Jeremiah and Paul to accompany him on a visit to some boys out of town who have reportedly been participating in some vigilante activities. He wants to question them, and he wants me along to give them some spiritual guidance. He told me, "Bring along your guns just in case. I will swear you in as a temporary Ranger." I like it when he does that because the extra money is always needed. I am somewhat concerned because it has been a while since I have carried weapons much less fired

them, but I figure these are local boys who are most likely smart enough to listen to reason. So I packed up Rahab, called Hustler, and left home to find Jeremiah, Paul and Henry. I was relaxed and whistling a tune...after all, I thought, "What could possibly go wrong?"

Matt Stephen

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