

Jedediah Webb: Frontier Pastor

Chpt. 15

January 1886

Those words, "Jeremiah has disappeared," cut me to the core. I felt a cold feeling in my gut as it wrenched into a tiny ball. Rachel was out of her mind with grief and her speech was garbled and confused. She cried out, "Jeremiah wired me three days ago that he was headed home from Buffalo Gap. Yesterday, Esther (Jeremiah's horse) returned home alone. I just know that Jeremiah is either hurt bad or dead. If he is alive in this storm, he does not have a chance!" I took hold of Rachel and said, "Of course he has a chance. I am going to find him." With that said, I headed for the door. Angel, who was there at the church helping Angela, stopped me and told me to take Paul with me, "You know that Paul will track Jeremiah faster than anyone else could. Talako will take care of our ranch while Paul goes with you." Angela agreed, "Without Paul, you might get lost and freeze to death. Take him with you." My ego was slightly wounded because they did not think I could do this alone, but I knew that they were right. No one could do this alone. I would need God to go with me.

I then hastily threw together the equipment I would need and saddled Rahab and called for Hustler. Paul met me at the Livery ready to go. I could have wondered how he could have known and responded so quickly, but after all, he is a Comanche warrior. Together we headed into the storm. There would still be some daylight left, but the wind was strong, and it was well below freezing. We headed on the trail that I usually take to Buffalo Gap. I prayed to the Lord for guidance, and I heard the Holy Spirit tell me the same thing that God told Moses as he was standing at the edge of the Red Sea while escaping from the Pharaoh's Egyptian army, "*Why are you crying out to me? ...Get moving!*" (Exodus 14:15). Moses taught us that sometimes God just tells us to quit praying and get moving.

God was with us. Just a few miles out on the trail, we came across a tree that had ropes tied all around it. Paul examined the area and said that something or someone had been dragged away from this tree. He and Hustler moved out following a trail that I never would have found. The snow was deep, and there was no trail I could see. Paul later told me that it was obvious to him that fresh snow had piled up on the area of the drag marks. We found Jeremiah under a deadfall of oak branches. We surmised that Jeremiah had been tied to the tree, and he loosened himself and dragged himself to the deadfall of brush for cover from the storm. How long he had been here we could not tell, but we knew he had to be treated immediately. We covered him with blankets and hoisted him onto Rahab for the trip back to town. I know that God's mighty hand was working because this entire process took less than two hours.

We quickly took Jeremiah to the church and reunited him with Rachel. After we convinced Rachel to let go of Jeremiah, Angela and Angel began to treat his wounds. Jeremiah was treated for frostbite, shock, cracked ribs, and numerous cuts and bruises. He had been severely beaten, tied to a tree, and left to freeze to death in the storm. Angela said that it would be touch and go for a while, but she thought that Jeremiah was strong enough to pull through this ordeal. It would be a while before Jeremiah could talk and let us know what happened. I was beside myself with anger. Rachel, too, was angry, but she was also frightened for her family.

The storm at last slowed down and people were able to get out of their homes and go back to doing business as usual. Sheriff Price was contacted, and he came to see Jeremiah who had begun to regain consciousness. Jeremiah told us that he was on the trail close to Coleman when he was set upon by some masked men who pulled him off Esther and hit him over the head. When he regained consciousness, he was tied to a tree. He did not recall the beating as he was out cold. He also did not recognize the men or know why they beat him. We had nothing to go on at present to determine who did this and why.

Sheriff Price had his suspicions. He recalled that several weeks ago, Matthew, Mark, and Luke Jenkins had been in a scuffle with Jeremiah over his daughter, Elizabeth. Matthew and Mark had been talking big around town about how they were

going to get revenge on Jeremiah and take care of his “uppity” daughter. He was also aware that all three boys left town the day after Jeremiah was found. Sheriff Price was determined to make an arrest, “We will find who did this and charge them with attempted murder. No one gets away with this in my county!” My friend, Texas Ranger Henry Armstrong, assured me that he would put the resources of the Texas Rangers to locate the Jenkins boys. His Ranger connections reached much further than Coleman County, and he was confident they would find the Jenkins boys and question them.

Jeremiah was not yet in stable condition, and Angela was watching him closely. As far as I was concerned, those boys were responsible. I wanted vengeance in the worst way. I wanted to personally hurt those boys. I asked God for discernment and to understand what to do and to give me the strength and courage to pull it off. I wanted God to tell me to get revenge, but I knew Jesus spoke out against vengeance, *“You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles” (Matthew 5:38-41).* Jesus tells us to remain holy and not lower our standards by resorting to violence. He advocated leaving judgment in God’s hands. The Apostle Paul reminds 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).*

I wanted to go looking for the Jenkins boys myself, but I knew that taking care of Jeremiah and his family was where I was needed most. Since the boys were long gone, I knew that I would have to wait for righteous judgment to occur.

February 1886

After the terrible blizzard storm of January, the month of February promised much milder weather. Unfortunately for Texas Ranger Henry Armstrong and his men, the range wars up north were heating up. Henry spent most of February near Abilene to help the cattle ranchers and sheepherders work out compromises that would keep everyone from shooting one another. So far there have been 10 deaths reported among

men protecting their herds from rustlers and fence cutters. Some of the big ranchers were hiring gun hands to eliminate competition. Henry had his hands full.

My father, James Webb, and my mother, Mary, paid us a visit from Dublin. My father had been diagnosed with lung cancer, and he wanted a second opinion from Angela. She examined him thoroughly and with tears informed me that he does indeed have symptoms of lung cancer. His breathing is shallow and rattling, and he is unable to take a few steps without running out of breath. He also reported chest pains, hoarseness, wheezing, and recently coughing up blood. Angela said he must rest, and we could send for one of her colleagues to verify our fears.

We moved my father and mother in with us so my father could receive the care he needed, but he was gone within two weeks. My mother was heartbroken, but she saw it coming for several months. I am grateful for the two weeks I got to spend with him. We were able to catch up on many things with the little time he had left. We talked of heaven and the joy of visiting with all the saints and all our ancestors. My father was really looking forward to reuniting with his mother, father, and siblings.

The funeral was held in Dublin, and Reverend Maurice Pendleton from the Dublin Methodist Church officiated. I was one of the pall bearers. We buried my father in the Cottonwood Creek Cemetery several miles outside of Dublin. The funeral and burial were attended by many friends and loved ones. Some of the people in Dublin considered my father to be a union sympathizer, and they would not attend the funeral. Many people still hold scars from the War Between the States. Mother was truly hurt by their attitude. My father had never spoken out against those on either side of the conflict, but I know that many people live and die with the attitude of "You are either with me or against me."

I know that we should all pray for comfort and peace for our families, communities, countries, and the world; but we are told by Jesus that there will always be hatred and war until He returns, *"You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains"* (Matthew

24:6-8). Despite this dire prediction that hate and war will always exist in this world, God charges us to do everything we can to extinguish hatred and instill peace among those around us.

Mother decided to return to Dublin and sell the ranch. Jimmy and I began working on a house in Coleman for her and our younger brother, Billy, and sisters, Maggie and Susan, who were still living with her. Jimmy, Billy, and I planned to continue to raise my father's prize quarter horses on Mother's new ranch in Coleman.

The best news this month is Angela's announcement that she is pregnant! She is due in September according to her calculations. I remember saying, "Having a third child shouldn't be any more work than having two." More foolish words were never spoken.

Spring 1886

Many changes are happening for the town of Coleman. In March, the Atchison-Topeka and Santa Fe Railway began running passenger trains between Brownwood and Coleman and to points beyond. This opened the town up to many strangers and newcomers. We no longer felt that Coleman was an isolated town on the outskirts of civilization. We now had traveling connections with all of Texas and much of the U.S. Feelings of isolation and danger were beginning to wane. Living without the constant fear of trying to survive has opened people up to feeling more optimistic, happy, creative, and neighborly. This town is a downright pleasant place to live!

Unfortunately, the railroad brought in people we might consider to be "Carpetbaggers." These are affluent people from up north who come to the southern states to take advantage of people and add to their wealth. A group of men arrived and were planning to buy up repossessed land and assign sharecroppers to work the farms. Currently in Coleman County the population is around 4,000 souls, and there are approximately 250 actively producing farms. Several of the local farmers who had run into trouble with their mortgage payments to the bank were in a panic because the carpetbaggers were ready to scoop up their property. Some of those on the verge of bankruptcy began to talk about defending their property with their lives, so the church

people got together with the bank officials and through generous donations were able to extend their mortgages for another year. With that, the carpetbaggers moved on to search for desperate people in other communities.

This was an excellent example of taking care of one another. Jesus tells us to take care of our neighbors, *"Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you"* (Matthew 5:42). Jesus also tells us that when we serve our neighbors, we are serving Him, *"Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me"* (Matthew 25:40). The Apostle Paul tells us how pleased God is when we do good to others, *"And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased"* (Hebrews 13:16).

Summer 1886

Panic hit our community this summer. A large rattlesnake den was uncovered underneath the parsonage. One of the children on the playground nearby grabbed a baby snake and took it to show his mother. I heard the scream clear across town. I know that a guardian angel was looking after that child because he was not bitten by the snake. There must have been over two dozen snakes in that den, and none of us knew how to safely remove and transport snakes from their dens. Our local blacksmith, Isaac (Jeremiah's son), created some 4-foot-long metal tongs for us to manage the snakes. It was a painstaking process, but we managed to relocate all those rattlesnakes far away from town. I told Isaac that he should produce more of those tongs to sell to anyone interested in wrangling snakes from a safe distance.

I reflected the next Sunday with the townspeople that God tells us one day there will be no more enmity between man and animals. The prophet Isaiah carried a message from God to his people about the end of times, *"The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf, the lion, and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the cobra's den, and the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest"* (Isaiah 11:6-8). Yes, all animals including humankind will exist in peace with one another...but not today. We

must constantly stay alert for any animal in the area that would harm us: wolves, bears, coyotes, mountain lions, bobcats, wild dogs, rabid skunks and bats, snakes, scorpions, spiders, and so on. We cannot let our guard down until Jesus comes back to reign over the Earth.

Summer is a time for me to relax and prepare sermons and activities for next year. Angela did not have time to relax because she was needed to treat 7 of Matías men who were hurt in a cattle stampede. A lightning strike had panicked a herd of over 600 cattle that Matías and his men were bringing up from Mexico. The stampede occurred just a few miles northwest of Coleman. Matías and his men were driving their herd to bypass the town when a storm began to brew. They continued to move the cattle as cattle do not want to stop due to their instinct to seek shelter in a storm. Normally when a stampede occurs, the cattle will run straight ahead following the lead steer. It then becomes the mission of the vaqueros to turn the cattle and have them run in a circle until they tire out. In this case, a lightning strike hit right in the middle of the herd thus sending them in a mad panic run in all different directions.

Matías and his men were vulnerable as the cattle were running in all directions. Men were knocked off their horses or their horses were pushed out from under them. Seven men and several horses were knocked to the ground and trampled. Only Matías and his brother Alejandro were able to stay mounted. They let the cattle go their way so they could focus on taking care of their men. Of the 10 men in the crew, 7 were severely injured and needed immediate medical attention. Matías assigned his brother to stay with the mounts and do what he could to round up some of the cattle. The 7 injured men were loaded into the chuckwagon, and they headed to town.

It was good to see Matías, but our reunion would have to wait. Among the injured men, Angela found broken bones of every type, skull fractures, severe cuts and bruising, internal bleeding, suspected internal injuries to organs, and shock. She and Angel got to work immediately while I looked for people to assist with the treatments. These injuries were all indicative of being kicked and stepped on by cattle weighing 1,000-1,500 pounds each. Unbelievably, some people refused to help because these were Mexicans and not worth their time. I reminded them of the *Parable of the Good*

Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). Jesus said what we do for our neighbors, we do also for Him. I told them that those who refuse to help others due to prejudice will answer to God for it later. It is not like a good preacher to make threats, but my anger took over my sense of good diplomacy.

Hours later, the men were stabilized enough so the doctors could take a rest. Angela told me, "It is time to consider building a structure that can hold multiple beds for occasions like this where numerous people are hurt or sick. I agreed and told her that I would take this up with the town leadership. Matías felt relieved when he learned his men were on the mend and it was believed that they would survive. "They all have families," he said, "They are desperately needed in this world, and I don't want to see them leave it yet." With that, he asked me for help rounding up the dispersed cattle.

I was excited about the opportunity to take part in a cattle roundup. I had worked with cattle on my father's ranch but had not experienced working with cattle to this degree. Paul and his son, Talako, agreed to help, so we joined Matías and his two remaining men and set out on the round up. I partnered up with Matías, and I was amazed at what that Vaquero could do with a horse and a riata. Rahab learned how to round up cattle much faster than I did. She was obviously watching and learning from Matías' horse, Esmeralda. By sundown we had returned about 450 cattle to the campsite. Within the next few days, we had recovered all but 50 head of cattle. Some were found dead and there were signs that some had been rustled and driven off. We had not the time or the manpower to chase the thieves down, so we let it go. Matías sent word to his father to send more men, so he could continue the drive. He chose to take the cattle to Fort Worth rather than to Kansas, so he could get back to his men quickly.

Later that summer, our Coleman churches did a wonderful thing for the children of our community. After several near drowning episodes among the kids swimming in local ponds and water holes last year, the church leadership coalition of Coleman County got together and made plans to build a water park on Hord's Creek. Tom Richardson, owner of the Triple R Ranch just west of Coleman, donated some of his land off the creek to build a park. We pulled together a crew of people to dredge out an

area on the creek to deepen the water level, and we secured swings on the nearby trees. We ensured that fresh water would stream in and out of the water hole to keep it clean. We even hired a lifeguard to be on duty at certain times of the week. This water park was safer and more under our control than the rest of the creek, and we were able to curb the number of near drownings. The community breathed a collective sigh of relief.

In July, Henry invited me to go on assignment with him and his men to Abilene to quell the range wars that were still kicking up in the area. Large ranch owners were squeezing out the small ranch owners by claiming these “nesters” have no water or grazing rights to the area. They were also using the excuse of discovering “Texas Cattle Fever” among the small ranchers’ cattle and ordering them to be exterminated. Henry wanted me along as chaplain to talk to the large ranch owners about sharing natural resources. That was a tall order!

Just like Nathan the prophet, I took the word of God to the large ranch owners. I told them a story from **2 Samuel 15** where Nathan had carried a warning from God to King David about lording his status over others. I told them the story of how a wealthy man who owned many sheep and cattle took the one lamb that a poor man owned and slaughtered it for a feast given to his guests. Nathan told King David that he had done the same kind of thing by taking Bathsheba away from her husband. God held King David accountable for his actions and punished him severely. I told the large ranch owners, “Gentleman, you may get away with persecuting the small ranch owners for a while here on Earth, but you will face judgment from God on Judgment Day for your greed. The penalty will be severe. You will be thrown into the lake of fire! Jesus tells us in his parable of the weeds, *‘The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears, let them hear’*” (**Matthew 13:41-43**).

The Holy Spirit made believers out of them. After my speech, the large ranch owners got together and hastily made amends and drew up guidelines for sharing water

rights, trail rights, and grazing rights among the area ranches. They asked me to bless their efforts, so we held a ceremony where we asked God to bless our efforts to love and share with our neighbors. I have no doubt that God's hand was with us because this encounter could have been ugly or even deadly.

Fall 1886

Another sad death was recorded this year. In August, Rustler, my faithful dog, died at the ripe old age of 10 years. Rustler saved my life on at least two occasions and saved me from harm many times. I owe him a debt that I cannot repay. I am grateful that God placed him in my life. I believe God has blessed humankind by gifting us with dogs. They are hard-working and loyal to their humans. They enjoy their masters' company, and they provide fun and companionship at anytime and anyplace. I am glad to still have Rustler's son, Hustler, at my side. Rustler's constant companion, Violet, mourned him like a good mate should. She had taken up residence with Angela's mother, Saphronia, and was keeping her and her husband, Clarence, good company.

Twice this fall, I rode out to observe the Jenkins' homestead to see if the boys had returned. From what I understood, Matthew and Mark had turned their souls over to darkness. I did not believe that Luke was walking that dark road, but he was obviously keeping company with his brothers. I could not help but think that Luke was a victim of all of this too. Mrs. Jenkins did not give me any information. I could tell that her soul was troubled for her sons. Mr. Jenkins was no help as he had disappeared years ago leaving Mrs. Jenkins to raise their five children by herself. It is a good thing that the boys have not returned. If they had returned, what would I have been capable of doing to them?

In September, we welcomed our third child into the world...a boy! We named him David James Webb (DJ) after both of his grandfathers. He was a difficult delivery, so Angel had her hands full. DJ was stubborn and hesitant to enter this world. Let us hope that this is not an indication of his future personality!

Winter 1886

It was a good summer and fall, and winter seemed to arrive all too soon. After the "Great Blizzard of 1885," no one was anxious to see winter arrive. The wintry weather began setting in around November. Two people who hardly seemed affected by the cold were my friend Texas Ranger Henry Armstrong and Matías' sister, Victoria. They were creating some heat all their own! I asked Matías what he thought was going to happen, and he said, "I am afraid that soon my father will pay a personal visit to Henry. I hope that he will not bring many of his men with him." My skin crawled a little as I envisioned the possibility of a race war being ignited in Coleman. I asked the Holy Spirit to help me discern what to do to help my friend Henry.

I did not have much time to think on this new dilemma because I received a telegram from Henry in Lampasas which read....

I have found the Jenkins boys!

Matt Stephen

March 2025