

Jedediah Webb: Circuit Rider

Chpt. 3

Fall 1877

In September of 1877, I was preparing for a trip. I informed the people on my regular circuit that I would be absent for at least a month while I traveled to the Buffalo Gap area in Taylor County to explore the need for Methodist churches. I had enjoyed a brief visit with my parents in Dublin, and I was fortunate not to run into Dirk Briggs again. I did visit Sarah to see how she was doing, and she was doing well. She was already interested in another man, so I figured I was off the hook with that relationship. Instead of total relief, I was a little downcast that the part of life which might include romance and starting up a family was not mine to partake at this time. Jesus says to pick up your cross and follow Him (**Matthew 16:24**). I guess my cross at the moment is to delay creating my own family as I take care of my numerous families on the circuit.

During my week in Dublin, I telegraphed my friend, Texas Ranger Robert Maloney, who is stationed in Taylor County, to see if he would meet up with me and provide me with company – and maybe protection – as I explored the area. He replied that he would be glad to do so, but he warned me that there was some Indian activity going on at the present time and to come prepared. I knew what that meant – bring weapons, ammunition, items for trade, and some extra courage. We agreed to meet up in Turkey Creek - about 50 miles east of Buffalo Gap. I always enjoy getting advice from Ranger Maloney. He is ready to advise me on legal issues and ways to survive in the wilderness, which can be a mixture of good and harsh advice depending on the situation.

I took some time to work with my good friend – probably my best friend - Jeremiah Anderson. Jeremiah is a man of color who moved to Dublin with his family from East Texas after being freed from slavery. He has apprenticed himself out to a blacksmith in Dublin, and he wants to become a Methodist preacher. He is currently learning to read and write, and he is studying the Bible. After being freed from slavery, most Black Texas churchgoers became Baptists, but Jeremiah wants to follow in the footsteps of Michael M. Clark and Houston Reedy and become a Methodist missionary for the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME). He began a church for colored people in the Dublin area. I have heard Jeremiah preach, and he delivers God's word with fiery passion and relevance for the people in his church.

Jeremiah felt it was better to move west after being freed from slavery in order to escape discrimination and hatred. Unfortunately, Jeremiah and his family are subject to hatred and discrimination from some White people here in Dublin. The Emancipation Proclamation was signed by President Lincoln in January 1863, and Texas finally implemented that proclamation in June 1865. At this point all slaves in Texas were free to go where they wished. Jeremiah told me that he had an opportunity to stay and work

as a sharecropper for his former master, but he realized he would never be his own man as he would always owe his "boss" for food and necessities for his family. In 1865, Jeremiah moved his family from East Texas to the West Texas wilderness area so he could own land and work for himself. In spite of the fact that Jeremiah is 15 years older than I am, we became fast friends when we met. We have many things in common with each other: faith in God, a desire to preach, an interest in blacksmithing, and a desire to deliver justice in this world.

Jeremiah and I spent a lot of time together before I began riding my circuit. I don't get to see him much anymore now that we are both serving God as spiritual leaders. I will always treasure him as a true friend and mentor. I will never forget his stories about what it was like to be a slave in a country that claims equality, freedom, and justice for all. He related stories about the beatings – not just for him but for his wife and children. He talked of working before sunup and past sundown with no free time other than to eat and sleep. He talked of when his wife was taken by men for hours at a time and her not wanting to ever talk about what was happening to her. He described what it felt like to be considered subhuman by everyone around him. These stories are too much for me to bear. I marvel how a person can still have faith in God even when enduring these horrible experiences. I can only lean on scripture that tells us that this world is imperfect, and humankind can be quite evil. Scripture also tells us that God has an unfailing love for us. As King David sings in one of his songs, *"How precious is Your unfailing love, O God! All humanity finds shelter in the shadow of Your wings"* (Psalm 36:7). God also tells us that trials here on Earth will strengthen us *"And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will Himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you"* (1 Peter 5:10). I see this in Jeremiah's life. He is a rock of faith and a light to shine for all who are willing to see it.

Slavery is an issue that has torn families, communities, states, and this entire country apart. While living in Arkansas, my father stood firm against slavery before the War Between the States began. This made him quite unpopular among family and friends as most of the Arkansans' sympathies lay with the Southern States. He did not join the Union forces, but he also did not volunteer to serve in the Confederate forces. He spoke out against slavery as an abomination to God. Although the Union won the war and emancipated the slaves, Black Americans continue to suffer from racist attitudes and violent actions from the Anglo Americans. I can only hope that one day humankind will see peace and brotherhood in the hearts of all people across the world. But the realist in me tells me that that humans cannot achieve this peace without Jesus returning and establishing a new world, *"The wolf and the lamb shall graze together; the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and dust shall be the serpent's food. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain, says the Lord"* (Isaiah 65:25).

God has never accepted humans enslaving one another. He heard the cry of his people and sent Moses to free them from slavery in Egypt. He returned his people to Israel numerous times as they were invaded by enemies and carried off into slavery. Jesus tells us to love others as much as we love ourselves, *"And you must love the Lord*

your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength. The second is equally important: Love your neighbor as yourself. No other commandment is greater than these" (Mark 12:30-31). Jesus also told us to do unto others as we would have them do unto us *"So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 7:12).* How can we truly follow Jesus' commands and yet enslave our fellow human beings?

Until Jesus returns, it is up to us to make our best efforts to expunge hatred, racism, bigotry, and cruelty here on Earth. John Wesley, founder of Methodism, said that merely tolerating the existence of a system of enslavement was accommodating evil. He mandated that all Methodist preachers deliver messages against the evils of slavery. The first Book of Discipline published by the Methodists mandated that any church member who buys or sells slaves would be immediately expelled from membership. The Methodist church declared the enslavement of Black people to be "the great national evil" of the United States. Many Southern members of the Methodist Church disputed the church's stand against slavery, and this caused a division among the Methodist Episcopal Church as well as the Northern and Southern States.

Before I could set out for Taylor County, two funerals needed to be conducted by our local pastor with Jeremiah and me assisting. Two young men met an untimely end because of the cry "Exterminate the Indians!" This cry became the mantra of many of the settlers in this area of Texas including Dublin, Stephenville, and areas to the north. Over the past five years, it is estimated that Comanche Indians have stolen over six million dollars of property and killed, wounded, maimed, or taken into captivity over 400 people within a 100-mile radius of the Stephenville area. The people had enough of living in constant fear for their lives and their property. One morning a group of eight young Dublin men set out to find some Indians and give them a taste of their own medicine. They were determined to take some hair and recover some property. There had been no Indian raids in the area in the past few months, but this group heard that there was a band of Indians camping near Green's Creek a few miles north of Dublin. They set out with guns loaded, blood in their eyes, and revenge in their hearts. When they returned that evening, they were two horses short, four men moderately wounded, two severely wounded, and two dead.

The incident was described to us by the survivors. As they traveled toward Green's Creek, they were talking with one another and boasting about who would take the most scalps. They even named their group the "White Avengers." As they emerged from a dense thicket near the creek, they suddenly came upon a band of Indians 30 members strong and not 50 yards away from them. The Indians were on horseback and obviously well-armed as they lifted their rifles over their heads, gave a concerted war cry, and galloped toward the White Avengers. Totally taken by surprise, the avengers turned their horses and immediately crashed into the dense thicket from which they had emerged. Immediately two horses went down from the Indians' bullets taking their riders down with them. The other avengers dismounted and used the brush for cover. After

exchanging fire, three of the Indians were on the ground and several more were wounded and retreating.

The Indian band rushed them on three more occasions wreaking havoc on the avengers in spite of their cover from the brush. After the fourth rush, the Indians decided to pick up their dead and wounded and retreated north beyond the creek. The avengers collected their wounded and dead and walked their horses back to Dublin. No one will ever know if this band of Indians intended ill will towards the settlers as they had not yet shown violence to anyone. It is possible they were just looking for stray horses or cattle to take back to the reservation. It is just as likely they were scouting soft targets on whom to rob and/or murder.

Once back in Dublin, the wounded were attended to, and the dead were taken to their parents. One of the dead, Jack Henderson, was a 20-year-old Black man. The other dead man was a 17-year-old White boy named William Gentry. The wounded were all going to recover in time, and the community went about mourning the dead. Many of the community members were angry with the Indians, and many of the community members were angry with the boys for initiating an unnecessary battle with Indian warriors. Angry or not, all of the community members were in mourning for this terrible loss. Jeremiah and I both helped with officiating the double funeral. The Dublin pastor spoke of the uncertainty of this world and the tragedy of losing children. He also spoke of God's love and redemptive plan. Jeremiah related stories of Jack, and I talked about William. We did our best to comfort family and friends by telling them that Jack and William were now face-to-face with Jesus on the other side of eternity. We can all take comfort that once we repent of our sins and accept Jesus as our savior – the one who died for us so we can spend eternity with God – we begin our heavenly journey. We spend the first part of our eternal life here on Earth doing what we can to improve this imperfect world; and when the time comes, we transition to the "other side of eternity" in heaven where there is no more pain and sorrow...only joy, peace, and infinite understanding, *"He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away"* (Revelation 21:4).

After the funeral, it was time to say my goodbyes and set out for Buffalo Gap. The journey would take me to Copperas Creek - about 45 miles west of Dublin. From there I would travel to Turkey Creek – about 12 miles west of Copperas Creek. There in Turkey Creek, I would link up with Ranger Maloney and travel 40 miles to Buffalo Gap. This is a minimum of four days of travel; and possibly more if I am needed in various communities to stay over for funerals, weddings, or baptisms. I find that no matter how thoroughly I try to plan out the travel agenda, changes in schedule are always needed in order to meet the needs of the people. I have learned to be flexible with my time which was not easy for me as my natural personality is to be in control and precisely plan all events. I am not a fan of surprises.

Because of the distance and the necessity to camp on the way, I decided to take my mule, Sadie, with me on this trip. A journey in September would require me to carry a tent for shelter and other camping necessities. Sadie is sure-footed and sturdy but not speedy. Sadie can take on a load and not complain – not like Rahab does. If outnumbered and chased by Indians, Rahab and I would have to leave Sadie behind to deal with the Indians on her own – a certain death sentence. This has happened to me twice, so I try not to develop a love relationship with my mules. Rahab seems to appreciate that.

A few miles west of Dublin, I was again surprised by the sudden appearance of Willie Lockhart. Willie wanted to accompany me to Buffalo Gap. "I've always wanted to see this wild camp near Buffalo Gap that some people are calling Abilene. Besides, I have some friends who have traveled there, and I would like to have a drink with them." In my heart, I was pretty sure that Willie really wanted to protect me during this journey. I welcomed him to ride along with me but asked him, "Please put those fresh scalps hanging from your saddle into your saddlebags to keep them hidden in case we meet up with a band of Indians."

Because of our late start, we camped between Dublin and Copperas Creek. I have traveled to Copperas Creek several times as it is close to my home base of Dublin. This community was started several years ago by a group of six families. These people have struggled with many hardships: poverty, food and water shortages, extreme weather conditions, lack of supplies, impossible workload, exhaustion, and constant travel to buy supplies from Dublin. This community has grown from 6 families to 20 families and single individuals with some of these people still living in tents and temporary structures. There is hope for this community as it just received an official post office, and some merchants are beginning to move in and open up their stores.

As I pulled into Copperas Creek, I saw fear and mourning on everyone's faces. I knew there would be funerals to preside over and grief to counsel. I was informed that just yesterday there was an attack by a band of Indians. The Walters family was completely wiped out except for the father who was out cutting timber at the time. He was not alerted to the trouble as there was no gunfire from the Indians, and his wife nor his children were able to get to a gun to fire a warning shot. The Indians struck quickly, quietly, and deadly. The two toddlers were run through with spears, the infant's head was bashed against a rock, the eight-year-old boy and six-year-old girl were carried away but not before Mrs. Walters was brutalized and mutilated in unspeakable ways. When Mr. Walters discovered the attack, he immediately set out with several friends to find his children who were carried off. He found them about three miles from the homestead...dead and mutilated. The community did not send a group after the Indians as there would not be enough men to safeguard the community if they pursued the murderers. Willie immediately took off on their trail and said he would be back soon.

The bodies of the Walters family were still lying in state in the Walters home. The neighbors had gathered to take care of the bodies and to watch over Johnathan Walters

who was acting quite suicidal. "I don't want to live," he said, "If this is the way God cares for his children, then I don't want to live in this world anymore or even see him when I die." This is one of those times when an entire community needs a spiritual leader to comfort and guide them.

We pulled together everyone as quickly as we could at the burial site to bury the family. It is good when we conduct a funeral for someone who has lived a long life and passed over to the other side of eternity in a peaceful way...this was not one of those funerals. The fear and grief were palpable. Some of the people were not even able to stand on their own and had to sit or be held. As sad and devastated as the community was, they needed to hear that God loves them and cares about their anguish. King David rejoiced even in the darkest times of his life because he knew that God loved him, *"I will be glad and rejoice in Your unfailing love, for You have seen my troubles, and You care about the anguish of my soul"* (**Psalms 31:7**). They also need to hear that we will all be reunited one day in God's kingdom. As Jesus said, *"You now have sorrow, but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you"* (**John 16:22**).

After the funeral, I gathered some of Johnathan's kin and closest friends to talk to him about reasons to go on living. God has a purpose for all of us. We are each unique with our God-given passions and talents, and God has a specific purpose for each one of us as we live out our lives here on Earth. No one else can take over the life God has planned out for each one of us; therefore, we need to keep our faith in God, and carry on with His purpose. The Apostle Paul knew each of us has work to do for God's kingdom, *"We are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do"* (**Ephesians 2:10**). In times of grief and stress, our thoughts of God's purpose can become unclear, so we must call upon God for peace, comfort, and understanding as to His will. King David knew he must call upon God, *"I cry out to God Most High, to God who fulfills his purpose for me"* (**Psalms 57:2**).

I stayed with the community another day to help them work through their grief and to make plans on how they could get Johnathan through the initial stages of his mourning process. I didn't feel good about leaving, but I knew several of his neighbors were excellent lay leaders and could help one another minister to his needs. The emotional healing process is a difficult and unpredictable thing. I asked the community to pray together for Johnathan's emotional and spiritual healing and to also pray continuously for one another.

Willie returned late that second day, and he had fresh scalps on his saddle horn. "I didn't get them all," he said, "but I killed three and wounded another three." There were about 15 in all, but they skedaddled quickly as they thought I was just one of many hidden in the thicket." He lifted up the scalp with extremely long plaited hair. "I also got me a female scalp...lifted it while she was still alive." Willie stated this as cool and calm as if he were seated in a comfortable chair, reading a good book, and sipping fine wine. Willie was certainly an avid killer, and I decided to talk to him about this once we hit the

trail. Willie offered his recent scalp collection to the community members which they gladly accepted. Times are hard and feelings are strong here on the fringes of civilization.

Once on the trail to Turkey Creek, I asked Willie about taking scalps. He told me it was a lucrative business to lift hair. He explained that the Mexican Government once paid bounties on Apache scalps, "They paid \$100 for a buck, \$50 for a squaw and \$25 for a child. They don't pay as good as they used to, but it still is a great way to make a living." I thought as barbaric as mutilation and lifting scalps may seem, it has been going on for centuries all over the world among all races and nations. Here on the Western American Wilderness, native tribes have been scalping and mutilating one another throughout history. The natives believe that a soul cannot get to the Happy Hunting Ground without its hair intact, so lifting the scalp ruins a warrior's afterlife. Mutilating the body also hinders one's soul in the afterlife. It is a way of getting in a final insult to an enemy; but for Willie, it is just a way to make a dollar.

Turkey Creek is truly an isolated community, alone in the wilderness, and a two-day ride to the nearest community for commerce. Being as isolated as it is, it is a prime target for all kinds of renegades. As a result of constant harassment, these people have become master fighters and defenders of one another and their properties. They are as close-knit as any community I have ever seen. Because of their ferocious resistance to interlopers, the Indians and bandits mostly steer clear of this community. Attacks rarely happen; and when they do, the attackers get the short end of the stick and the long end of the rifle barrel.

I think about the spirituality of the people in this community. Living in Turkey Creek is a hard life, and one cannot live there without hardening one's own emotions. Fighting for your life on a daily basis has got to play havoc on those Fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (**Galatians 5:22-23**). To keep these Fruits of the Spirit in one's life in this community, one must focus on his or her relationship with God every minute of every day. I am amazed at those who can do this. Their faith is much stronger than the evils of this world.

It was a short trip that day to Turkey Creek, so we stayed one night only. The sermon I gave that evening was on King David's ultimate trust in God to protect him and his people. King David created numerous songs regarding the Lord's protection. I read to the community members the entire Bible passage from the 22nd Chapter of 2 Samuel, one of the most powerful exhortations of God's mighty ability to protect his people, "*The LORD is my protector; He is my strong fortress. My God is my protection, and with Him I am safe. He protects me like a shield; He defends me and keeps me safe*" (**2 Samuel 22:2-3**). I go on to tell how King David described how God delivers him and his people and destroys his enemies.

The community was excited to hear more about God's love and protection, and we sang songs of exaltation and courage. The women and children created a meal fit for royalty for the entire community. We ate, sang, told stories, and shared news until the wee hours of the morning. I also was introduced to several young women who "would be a perfect wife for me one day." A couple of the girls were way too young, in my estimation, to be involved in matchmaking; but I guess these mothers plan as early as they can for their daughters. I graciously thanked each one of them for the introduction and wished them all well.

The next morning Willie and I loaded up our horses and Sadie and hit the trail. The weather was good for mid-September. The days were somewhat windy and temperate. The evenings could get chilly, so the tent and camping equipment came in handy. I had no homes established on this route as places to stay the night, so we needed to camp and build a fire to stay warm. Fires at night make me nervous when there is illicit activity going on in the area. If I am alone, I make it a habit to pitch a cold camp unless there is shelter in an abandoned house or a cave. On this night, Willie and I took turns sleeping while the other was on watch. When I woke up to take over Willie's watch, he was sound asleep. His snoring certainly would have alerted any Indians or bandits in the area. I roughly roused him and told him to go back to sleep.

All the next day on the trail, Willie was quite talkative. I wanted to learn more about him, so I let him talk. Willie told me how he killed and scalped the three Indians and wounded at least three others. He went on to say, "I would kill them all if I could. Not only that, I would also fix it so their souls can't get to the Happy Hunting Ground. They believe that the soul leaves their bodies through their mouths when they die. I like to hang them before they die, so that the choking traps their soul, and their soul dies along with the body. They also believe that they must have their beautiful hair to get to the Happy Hunting Ground. I reckon that's why they risk their lives to pull their dead friends off of the battlefield...to keep them from being mutilated. Oh well, that is how I like to leave them. As I like to say, a dead, hairless, and choked-out injun who can't get the to Happy Hunting Ground is a good injun."

Willie pulled a plug of tobacco to chew on while he continued, "They like to cut off the ears, nose, fingers, and other body parts of people to wear as a necklace or pinned to their clothing. The more kills they display, the more prestige they earn in their tribe. Many of the braves have trouble with the guns that they bargain for from gun dealers because they don't really know how to clean them or repair them. Nothing gives me more pleasure than to watch an injun trying to fix a jammed gun while I shoot 'em."

I could tell that Willie was recalling some scenes that bothered him. He began to talk more slowly and quietly, "I have seen some really harsh things as I come upon wagons and homes that have been attacked. Them injuns must really like to desecrate the bodies of the people they kill...doesn't matter what color of skin or whether a man, woman, or child. They rarely leave their body untouched. It seems to me that they enjoy cruelty. I am thankful I have never been an eyewitness to their torture because that

means I would be the one being tortured. I don't plan to ever be captured alive. I will cut my own throat if I have to." Willie went quiet after that. He seemed to be lost in his own thoughts and preferred the quiet. I was more than happy to join him in solitude. A talk with him about his own bent toward murder and mutilation will just have to wait.

Toward that evening, we met up with Ranger Robert Maloney. He had already set up camp and had steaming hot coffee and a meal cooking. Ranger Maloney is a tall, strongly built, no-nonsense type of person. He is about 10 years older than I am, and he has served as a Texas Ranger for about 15 years. As a Texas Ranger, he has gained invaluable experience in tracking, fighting Indians and Desperados, protecting Settlers, and bringing all kinds of law breakers to justice. Ranger Maloney's assignment is to cover five different counties including Taylor County with a scouting party of only 10 men under his charge. He is over-worked, underpaid, and threatened constantly by humans, wild animals, and nature itself. His experiences seem to have hardened him in certain parts of life, but he still has a positive attitude toward humankind in general. As I said before, I value everything he has to say, and I am anxious to learn from him.

Over a delicious dinner of venison stew, we talked of many things – especially the problems with the recent Indian uprisings. Ranger Maloney told us how the Indians had been moved to reservations in Indian Territory after the Red River War. He said, "Although many of the tribal elders are content to live out their lives on the reservations, the young warriors are not. The young warriors are a warring group dead set on taking revenge out on the White man for encroaching on their land. They also seek status in their tribes through battles and stealing horses. They often head south in small scouting bands looking for cattle, horses and sometimes hair. The more horses and scalps young warriors gain, the more prominent their status is among the men and women of the tribe. They know where the U.S. Army Cavalry is located, and they purposely avoid crossing their paths. Instead, they scout out the softest targets they can find and make the easy thefts and kills."

Maloney continued, "Their favorite method of attack is quietly moving in on homesteads in darkness. Their preference of weapons is tomahawks, knives, and arrows as they can kill quietly. They also prefer the close kills as it provides the thrill that they are seeking. It seems their favorite targets are people who are traveling alone. They are easy prey and can be dispatched and maimed without worry of attack from others. Sometimes the scouting parties will wait around until they are chased by a group of settlers. Their favorite trick is to run and allow themselves to be chased...right into an ambush which was set up well in advance. A great number of settlers have been killed in this manner."

Ranger Maloney went on to say that the Rangers and the U.S. Army Cavalry have a hard time patrolling the vast area of North and Central Texas with the monetary support they are given by the U.S. and Texas Governments. The Indian scouting bands can usually stay three steps ahead of the Rangers as they are small and extremely fast. They can make a hit on a homestead or small community, and then be miles away

before anyone knows about the attack. The Texas Rangers and the U.S. Army actually have more success against the larger war parties. Sometimes the war parties can number 100 warriors or more. With such large numbers, they are easier to spot and less flexible in movement.

We congratulated Ranger Maloney on the delicious food. He said a few years ago, he had to subsist on only corn and what game he could kill. Lately, the Texas Government has been supplying Texas Rangers with enough flour, bacon, coffee, sugar, beans, and rice to keep the Ranger scouting parties well fed. We thanked the Texas Government for its generosity while we ate. It was getting late, and it was time to turn in. Two of us would sleep warmly by the fire while one of us stayed alert and on watch just outside of the light of the fire. I told Willie if I woke up and he was asleep on watch that I would pistol whip him. He laughed and stepped out of the light to take the first watch. I guess he thought that I was just kidding. I was not.

The next morning we hit the trail for Buffalo Gap. Ranger Maloney advised me to hang my revolver from the saddle horn with a rawhide strip for easy and quick access. He showed me how fast one can shoot at two and four-legged varmints from a close distance with the hanging revolver. I told Maloney about the attack on Copperas Creek. He was not surprised by the brutality. He lamented the fact that there was just not enough protection to cover this much territory. He had plans just like the U.S. Army did to train the men and women of these outlying communities to effectively band together and protect one another. Still, if people insisted on living alone on their own acreage, there was only so much the Texas Rangers could do to protect them.

It was about midday when Willie suddenly stopped and cursed himself for not scouting further ahead. I looked up from the trail and saw a band of Braves – 12 in all – on horseback facing us and blocking the trail. They didn't appear to be in a violent mood as they did not immediately charge towards us when we spotted them. I did notice the numerous scalps hanging from their belts and breast plates. Some of the scalps were Anglo scalps as they were blonde and strawberry blonde in color. They were not shy about displaying those scalps to us. Perhaps they wanted to see our reactions. I was glad that Willie put his scalps away. If trouble started, at least it wouldn't be our fault.

We needed to know their intentions. Did they want to trade for something, or did they want to steal weapons, horses, and ammo? We waited for them to make the first move. The leader of the group looked us over and paid special attention to Willie and Ranger Maloney. After a few very long minutes of eyeing us, they turned their ponies around one-by-one until they were all heading in the opposite direction. Not one word was said. It was obvious to me, and they both verified my suspicion, that the braves recognized Willie and Maloney and wanted nothing to do with them. Apparently, their reputations were well-known and respected or feared. Those two probably saved my hide on this day. If it had been just me, Rahab and Sadie on the trail, I would now be a dead, dismembered, disemboweled, hairless, nose-less and earless corpse.

I endured a restless and sleepless night once we camped. Even though I trust God for His enduring love and protection, I realize how evil this world is. As Christians, we have no guarantees that we will not be harmed by evil; however, we do know that ultimate victory is Jesus' and that nothing can separate our eternity with God except ourselves. Only I can make the decision to walk away from God and not accept Jesus' sacrifice for my sins. Only I can make the decision to live out eternity in sorrow and pain. No matter what this world hands me, I will not walk away from God. The trials and tribulations will only bring me closer to Him. I will work further on those thoughts and bring them to my people in a sermon. With those comforting thoughts, I finally drifted off to sleep.

The next evening, we rode into Buffalo Gap. I noticed that this community was pretty well developed as it has been in existence for about 15 years. A lot of the community is what I would call a rough crowd - buffalo hunters and skinners as well as cattle drivers. There are also several businesses and wood structures lining the main road through town. Also, there are quite a few tents on the edge of town. These tents will one day be turned into wood structures, but wood has to be hauled in from other parts of Texas. Out here in West Texas, mesquite and cedar bushes reign as the dominant sources of wood. There are numerous families who have made homes in the area, and there is real promise that this will be a thriving community. There are several denominations of worshipers in the area such as Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian, and Catholic. One building and two large tents have been erected for all community members to use for social meetings and worship services.

The community of Buffalo Gap wakes up when cattle drives come through from South Texas heading up to Abilene, Kansas. Cowboys will stop to eat and rest here, but they conserve their energy for the wild place just north of town. I am told that this place up north is a modern-day Sodom and Gomorrah. It is a place where buffalo hunters, cattle drivers, gunslingers, and outlaws of every kind meet to have a rowdy time. Many people believe that this place will one day be named after the cattle drivers' destination in Kansas - Abilene. For now, I just call it Cow Town.

Willie took off to scout the area. I suspect he scouted several saloons. Ranger Maloney checked in with fellow Texas Rangers in town, and I looked up some of the religious leaders in the area. I met with lay people from the three protestant churches and discussed setting up a camp meeting to be held in three days' time. I assumed that would give me time to go north and scout the Cow Town community and get back in plenty of time to share the preaching duties of the camp services. We decided to invite people from smaller communities around Buffalo Gap for a two-day camp meeting. The lay leaders began organizing and advertising the camp meeting, and I began preparations to head to Cow Town.

The next morning, Ranger Maloney and I were all packed and ready to go when Willie came dragging up behind us. His eyes were as bloodshot as I have ever seen them. He told us that he ran into some buddies and that he had done some serious

drinking. Both Maloney and Willie had heard from their compadres that there was Indian activity in the area and to be on guard. Our 15-mile trip to Cow Town was uneventful except for varmints of the four-legged kind and no-legged kind. It seems that Sadie doesn't like snakes or any kind of wild animals on the trail. She balked and ran off several times on the trail; and once when confronted by a rattlesnake, she reared and bucked off all the load from her back. The donkey in her came out, and she stomped that snake good. It took quite a while to gather everything up and get back on the trail, so we pulled into Cow Town late in the afternoon. I was hoping to get to see the town before it was time to settle in for the night.

We walked down the main drag, Texas Street, or as many dubbed it, "Hell's Highway." I have never seen such a place. Willie's eyes were wide with anticipation while Ranger Maloney's eyes were squinted with suspicion of everyone and everything. My eyes just drank in all of what there was to see. What I saw was what I suspected a 19th century Sodom and Gomorrah would be like.

Texas Street was lined with tents which held saloons, brothels, and gambling establishments. If one was looking for rotgut whisky and soiled doves, he was in the right place. Urine and feces of horses, cattle, and humans were piled up in the street which added to the unique smell of cigar smoke, whisky, and unwashed clothes and unbathed skin. I could see many civil and moral laws being broken right there on the street for everyone to see. One street over, I saw some roughly hewed wood buildings. There was a bank, a hotel, a restaurant, a dry goods store, and several businesses needed for a community to survive. What I did not see was a lawman's office of any kind. There was no church or school as these are often the last buildings to be constructed in a new community.

On the edge of town, there was a significant Boot Hill that was filled with fresh graves – including two graves marked as "lawman." The undertaker was doing good business. I later learned that several attempts had been made to create law and order in the community, but the good guys were outnumbered by the bad. Texas Street was so rough that an average of one dead person was discovered every morning after a night's raucous revelry.

It was late in the afternoon, and it was time to eat and rest. Maloney and I looked for a reputable place to stay the night. Willie went off looking for a place as disreputable as possible. He was not worried about running into scoundrels as he was probably as bad as anyone in the vicinity. Maloney and I found a hotel designed for civilized folks as the rooms were neat and clean and not rented out on an hourly basis. Next to the hotel was a reputable restaurant which did not serve liquor – only the best beefsteak and potatoes I have ever eaten, and the peach cobbler was enough to entice fullness and sleepiness on my part. I went back to the hotel while Maloney went out looking for anyone sober enough who could share news with him about the town or about the Indian uprisings in the area.

The next morning I met Maloney at breakfast, and we discussed what he had learned. He was told that there was no preacher presence at all in the community. He was told that it was not unusual for cowboys to practice their shooting skills by attempting to shoot God's word out of anyone's hands who happened to be carrying a Bible. He introduced me to a man named Mac who seemed to be a leader of sorts in the community. He owned the hotel, restaurant, and livery stable of which we were making use. He was an educated man, and he seemed interested in turning this rowdy camp into a legitimate town. He stated that the good people in the area were looking forward to decent families moving in and helping to create schools, churches, a town government, and an effective law enforcement system.

We spent the remainder of the day talking with people and learning more about the camp. On the trail home, I will work on the report to the Methodist Conference about Cow Town. Apparently it is not immediately ripe for starting a church, but the Word of God is desperately needed. I most likely will recommend that a rough-and-tumble preacher be assigned to a circuit including this Cow Town and Buffalo Gap to begin God's work in this area.

The next morning, we loaded up and headed back to Buffalo Gap. Willie told us he planned to spend one more night with his friends, old and new, and that he would rejoin us the next day in Buffalo Gap. I couldn't help but wonder if I would ever see him again. Ranger Maloney informed me that the word on the Indian uprisings was that some small Comanche and Apache bands have been spotted in the area, but they have not been aggressive and have not been seen in the past two or three months. This was good news, but I was concerned to hear that Apache Braves were making an appearance this far north. They usually raid communities in South Texas and Northern Mexico along the Rio Grande River.

When we arrived in Buffalo Gap that evening, the camp meeting was set up at the largest barn in the area belonging to Clyde Jenkins and family. Food had already been gathered and meat was being smoked by the men of the churches. A nursery had been set up in the farmhouse next to the barn, so the babies could nurse in private with their mothers and could sleep soundly during the services. Services would be held on Monday morning and afternoon as well as the following Tuesday morning. Monday night would be a social with music and dancing. There was an area staked out for wagons and tents for those who planned to spend the night – which was everybody. No one wants to miss a moment of a camp meeting as it is the social event of the season in small communities such as Buffalo Gap and the surrounding area.

We began on Monday morning precisely at 8:00 a.m. There were approximately 80 people in attendance. There would have been more, but some people didn't attend because they did not want to leave their homes unprotected from predators – four-legged and two-legged alike. At least 8-10 babies and small children were taken to the farmhouse for childcare with their mothers and a couple of men to guard over them. A handful of people were assigned to prepare the food and set the tables for lunch. The

rest of us were in the barn ready to worship the Lord. There was a rotation of men on four lookout stations to keep an eye out for trouble – not just from Indians but from anyone who would disrupt the worship service.

Three preachers were slated to deliver messages, and a choir was ready to regale us with beautiful music. I was ready to do my part and had finished preparing my sermon on the road back from Cow Town. I always do my best to appeal to people's emotions with my sermons. I believe a sermon that is aimed at the heart is better than one that is aimed at the head. I learned early to preach with what Henry Smith, a well renowned preacher, called a "holy knock-'em down power." So I always pray to the Holy Spirit to "fire-up" my soul and my mouth to reach those who need to hear the message loud and clear and feel the emotion of the message.

After lots of prayer and singing and a message from the Baptist preacher on the love of God, the destructiveness of Satan, Jesus' perfect sacrifice to atone for our sins, and our free will to choose between Heaven and Hell, I could see that the Holy Spirit was moving in the people's hearts. It was now time for me to step up and share a message. I asked the Holy Spirit to speak the words we each need to hear and began the sermon, "Brothers and sisters, some people may think that once they accept Jesus Christ as their Savior that they are cleansed of their sins forever and will sin no more. We know this is not true as we continue to sin even after we are justified by accepting Christ as our savior. Jesus, because he was sinless, was the perfect sacrifice to atone for our sins. Because of Jesus, we can be with God forever in Heaven. Along with our redemption, we must still be in a constant state of repentance for our sins. We must ask God to forgive us when we sin, and we must take action to rid sin from our lives. Repentance rids our souls of sin. As faithful as King David was to God, he still repented of his sins. Often, he sang songs of penance to God, *"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me"* (Psalm 51:10). Through repentance and hard work to eliminate our sinful nature, we grow into the holy life that God wants us to live. This is called Sanctification."

I could see that I had their attention, and I thought this was a good opportunity to talk about one of our greatest concerns here on the edge of civilization in Texas – how to deal with our enemies – those who want to do us harm. I took a cool sip of water and said, "I suppose that people ask you if you are an Indian lover, an Indian hater, or an Indian tolerator. Jesus tells us to love our enemies..." Just as I said these words, I heard gunshots being fired followed by ear-piercing yells that came from outside of the barn. Arrows came flying in through ground level and hayloft doors. Arrows hit people and objects at random. At least 10 people were hit with the first volley. Some fell dead and others were injured. The way of life here on the edge of the Texas Wilderness is to carry a weapon with you everywhere you go and be ready to use it. True to that code, everyone grabbed their gun and immediately sprang to their feet and headed toward the door. Several more volleys of arrows arched through the barn doors.

We could only assume that there had been a sneak attack on those who were on guard, and that the war party had positioned themselves around the barn and farmhouse to pin us inside while they looted the place. We could hear some of the Braves rounding up horses as well as ransacking some of the wagons. We didn't know if their intent was to kill us or just steal what they could and leave. It looked as if there were at least 50-60 warriors surrounding the barn as well as the farmhouse. To our horror, we saw that they were shooting flaming arrows into the sides and the roof of the farmhouse attempting to light it up. The men and women in the farmhouse were putting on a good defensive stand with their fire power from the window and door slits.

The Indians had underestimated the strength of the fire power in the barn and the farmhouse. Every man, woman, and child were aiming their guns at whomever they could put their sights on. We could see warriors were dropping by the dozens and the settlers were well-protected behind the building walls. After just a few minutes, the war party decided that the odds were against them; and they lit out - taking 20 or so horses, some supplies from some wagons, and some of the food from the tables. No one followed the war party as they could have been led into an ambush down the road, and there was the possibility that the warriors might double back to the barn after the settlers took chase. Some folks tended to the wounded and the dying while others were putting out the flames in the farmhouse.

There was much grief and sorrow as we cleaned up from the attack. All four men on guard duty were killed. Three of the men were surprised by the sneak attack and had their throats cut. One was able to warn us with gunfire before he was killed. A total of 12 settlers in the barn were wounded and 5 were killed - 2 men, 2 women, and an 8-year-old girl. No one in the farmhouse was killed and only one man was wounded - burned as he put out the flaming arrows.

The next two days were quite different than planned. The remainder of the camp meeting service was canceled. Many of the people returned home to protect their property from possible invasion while those who stayed dealt with funerals and nursing the wounded. Food was still prepared for those who stayed, but the joy of a camp meeting turned into anger, sadness, fear, and despair. Just as they had done many times before, the living embraced the living, and the dead and wounded were attended to with love and gentleness. Sheer exhaustion put me to sleep that night on the day of the attack. On the second night, I, myself, had some troubling thoughts as I tried to fall asleep. Love your enemies? Really?....after all of this? I had some thoughts to work out with God myself before I could readily and authentically continue extoling His message of love and harmony.

After conducting the funerals, I spent some time talking to the leaders of the Buffalo Gap community. They were all in favor of having a regular presence of a Methodist preacher and work toward establishing a Methodist Church for the entire area. These are possibly the strongest examples of faithful and steadfast Christians that I have ever seen in a community. In spite of the hardships and dangers of the Texas

Wilderness, these people are resolved to building a community and operating it according to God's will and His commands. They are thankful from the bottoms of their hearts for Jesus and His sacrifice for them so they can live forever in the Promised Land. When I spoke to the families over these next two days, I felt the presence of the Holy Spirit. I knew these people were survivors, and they deserved to have a spiritual leader who would help keep the presence of the Holy Spirit in their hearts and minds.

Following this melee, Willie and Ranger Maloney were determined to accompany me to Brownwood which was approximately 60 miles to the south in Brown County. From there I would part with Maloney. Willie would then accompany me the next 50 miles back to Dublin. With hesitation, I bid the good people of Buffalo Gap good-bye. They were so generous in supplying us with food and other necessities for the continuation of our trip. They told us the little of what they knew of the Brownwood settlement, and they cautioned us of the presence of marauding bands of Apache Braves, Mexican Bandits, and White Desperadoes in the area. We were grateful for the information and ready to face whatever evil the world had to offer. I rely on Moses' words told to Joshua and his people as they prepared to enter the Promised Land, "[The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; He will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged](#)" (**Deuteronomy 31:8**).

In spite of all that occurred here in Taylor County, nothing prepared me for what I was about to see on the way back to Dublin through the Brownwood area.

Matt Stephen

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