

Jedediah Webb - Circuit Rider

Chpt. 9

Summer 1879

Once back home in Coleman, Angela and I began moving our possessions into the parsonage. There are some final changes to be made in the house, but I can do that a little at a time. I moved my things from Mrs. Flannagan's boarding house, and Angela moved a few things from her family's home. I already miss Mrs. Flannagan's cooking, but Angela is a very capable cook and housekeeper. I believe in helping with household chores which runs contrary to most men's beliefs. We have a long way to go to furnish the house, but we are glad to be on our own. I am already thinking about purchasing some land on which I can stable my animals and start some crops. The life of a circuit rider usually involves a second income, and I am ready to be a rancher and farmer as well as a preacher.

The June conference meeting with the Methodist leadership yielded no assignment change for me other than to continue to explore the addition of the communities of Clyde and Vickory to the circuit. These communities are just east of Abilene. The people are anxious to be added to the circuit, so this should be an easy task. One issue I am facing is that the members of the Coleman church are pressuring me to consider dropping the circuit and be a full-time preacher in Coleman. That is an enticing idea for me, but I have just begun the new circuit, and I am not ready to turn it over to anyone else.

Now that the honeymoon is over, and we have moved into the parsonage, it is time to run the next lap in the circuit. Angela wants to go along with me to determine the medical needs of the people on this circuit. I will take her as long as I can find someone else to travel with us. I believe that some extra protection is needed when Angela rides with me. Little did I know how right I was about that.

I located Willie. He has been busy doing I don't know what. He wouldn't share with me any specific details. Willie likes Angela very much and was eager to join us on the circuit to keep us both safe. Willie said, "You just don't know the element of two-legged varmints who exist in Abilene. They are so bad, even I walk gently around some of them." Coming from Willie, this meant a lot to me. Willie knows evil when he sees it. He can recognize evil intent even when people hide it well. We loaded up our horses as well as Sadie and Buster to hold all of Angela's medical necessities. We said goodbye to our neighbors, and we hit the trail. A few hours after we left, Rustler showed up to tag along with us. Apparently he was trying to decide whether to stay with his girl-dog friend, Violet, and Angela's sisters (with whom he is quite enchanted) or to tag along with us for a new adventure. I guess his adventurous side won out over his domestic side.

Angela's horse, Sophia, is a Quarter Horse from my father's ranch. She is a light brown Buckskin, and she is especially fast and strong. My father made sure she was a safe horse for Angela. I wanted to pay him for her, but he got insulted and said, "This is a wedding gift...don't look a gift horse in the mouth." Angela named her horse after Sophia Jex-Blake - the woman who is fighting to allow women to serve as doctors in Great Britain. She is somewhat of a hero to Angela. Angela does not ride side-saddle; she rides like a man. Her uncle taught her to shoot, and she is quite a sharpshooter - as good as most men. After all, she is on a mission just like any man would be. In my opinion, Angela is ahead of her time and an excellent role model for other women.

Angela made it clear to me that she wants a horse-drawn vehicle (a Doctor's Buggy) with a wooden crate for storage. She looked me in the eye with authority and said, "If I am going to be accompanying you from time to time, I want to be fully supplied with necessary instruments and medications." Angela left Angel in charge of any medical needs at Coleman during her absence. Angela and Angel have exchanged medical ideas from their cultures with one another. Both cultures are benefiting a great deal from this exchange. Many people shortchange the medical practices of the native tribes, but not me. I have seen miracle healings through the herbs and incantations that Angel provides for people who appear to be hopeless causes. I believe it is arrogant for

settlers to believe that the “white man’s” medicine is the best or only remedy for human sufferings.

It is July in Texas. Summertime travel can be just as bad as winter travel. It is often 85° at night and 105° in the day with drought conditions. Extra water is important and difficult to carry in adequate quantities. Usually we have to alternate Sadie and Buster although they are both needed for this trip. Buster can be quite frustrating. He has a lot of donkey tendencies such as digging in when he doesn’t want to move, but carrots and sugar work as excellent incentives. I love seeing him double-time his pace when sugar is offered. One advantage of summer is that varmints are out only at night on the prowl for food and water. As long as we build a big fire at night, we should be safe from them. Also, Rustler and Rahab are light sleepers. They are great sentinels and are ready for action when trouble arises.

On our circuit, we constantly came across ungodly behavior in every community. We witnessed and heard stories of just about every sinful act possible: cattle rustling, horse thieving, alcohol abuse, infidelity, hate mongering, bigotry, rumor spreading, fighting, attempted murder, and murder. While some of these behaviors took Angela by surprise, Willie and I had already seen and heard it all. I am aware that there are many people who have chosen a pattern of thinking and acting in ways that are against God’s laws. Paul tells us, *“For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God” (Romans 8:5-8)*. I suppose that all I can do is to try my best to help people alter their patterns of thinking to reflect the ways of God rather than the world.

The most common health problems Angela found in the communities of the circuit were allergies and breathing issues, Yellow Fever, under-nourished children, mothers worn out from birthing multiple children, people working themselves to exhaustion, and diseases caused by unsanitary conditions. The most alarming health issue she found was the Cholera outbreak. Because of unsanitary conditions, Cholera

was present in all of the communities: Brownwood, Copperas Creek, Turkey Creek, Vickory, Clyde, Abilene, and Buffalo Gap.

Cholera (or “blue death” as it is called) is a messy and painful disease caused by bacteria. Symptoms are vomiting, diarrhea, cramping, sunken eyes, clammy skin, dehydration, bluish skin, seizures, and coma. It is mostly caused by poor personal hygiene, insufficient clean drinking and bathing water, eating spoiled food, and generally living in unsanitary conditions. These conditions proved ideal for the spread of Cholera which can even lead to death if not treated properly or in time. This reason gave Angela a sense of urgency in treating the disease and training people in healthy sanitation habits.

Angela told me that during his experiments in the 1860s, French chemist Louis Pasteur developed the modern “Germ Theory.” He proved that food spoils because of contamination by invisible bacteria, and he stated that bacteria can cause infection and disease. Accepted treatments for bacterial infections involve salt intake, hydration, improved sanitation, and isolation of patients. Little could be done for Cholera patients other than to administer medicines or herbs which might relieve the horrifying cramping.

Along with introducing Angela to the communities on the circuit, I had a sermon ready for each stop. I had Bibles to pass out, and I preached about the love of God and the joy that King David displayed as he sang the 100th Psalm: *“Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth. Serve the Lord with gladness; come into his presence with singing. Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people and the sheep of his pasture. Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise. Give thanks to him; bless his name. For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever and his faithfulness to all generations”* (Psalm 100). We live in a hard world, and it is easy to be too busy to stop and feel the joy that God intends us to have. Psalm 100 is a beautiful reminder of how much God loves us. I asked people to read this psalm to their families daily and eventually put it to memory.

Angela was well-received in all of the communities we visited. They were very appreciative of the medical treatments and the lessons on sanitation and disease prevention. As well as she seemed to be respected, some people were skeptical of a

woman's authority to instruct them in how to live on the frontier. Overall she was treated with respect and dignity; however, I did notice a few men looking her over with lust in their eyes.

At one point on the trail between Abilene and Buffalo Gap, I took leave of Willie and Angela to scout up ahead. After looking over the terrain and not spotting anything of concern, I heard gunshots from a distance behind me. Rahab turned around and took off toward the gunshots before I had the opportunity to spur her to do so. She was probably concerned for Sophia, Sadie, Buster, Rustler, and her human friends, and she wanted to check things out. This was one time I didn't mind her not letting me be in full control. When we arrived at the site where Angela and Willie were, I saw three men on the ground and Angela and Willie were standing there arguing.

I learned that after I pulled ahead to scout the trail, three men came up behind Angela and Willie. At gunpoint, they ordered Angela and Willie off of their horses. They were making comments about how good Angela looked and how she shouldn't be out in the wilderness with such an unscrupulous character. It was obvious to Angela that these men knew Willie, but she didn't know what their intentions were. Did they plan to rob them? Were they just teasing Willie? What would happen to her?

She didn't have much time to consider these questions because Willie had secreted the saddle scattergun to his side as he dismounted. Without hesitation, he unloaded the scattergun toward two of the men who were close together. The men and the horses fell. He turned his colt to the third man and emptied him from his saddle. The men were obviously surprised at Willie's attack as they did not even have time to fire their guns. All three men and two of the horses died from their wounds within minutes.

"You didn't have to kill them," Angela said. "Oh yes, I did," replied Willie. "We didn't know what their intentions were," Angela fired back. "I did," said Willie. "They were going to rape you and kill us both." Angela angrily yelled, "you don't know that." Willie replied, "I know these men, and they weren't going to let us live after they had their fun." I stepped into their argument and suggested that we bury the men and report the incident to the authorities in Buffalo Gap. Willie agreed, but he declined to accompany us to Buffalo Gap. "I don't want to hang for killing these disgusting varmints. They

deserved to die for what they were going to do to us.” I did not argue with him, but I did thank him for saving Angela, and I told him I would report the incident as self-defense. However, I do not know if Angela will agree with that. She is the eyewitness, and a lot will depend on what she has to say to Sheriff Crawford. Angela hugged him goodbye, but her parting words were, “You didn’t have to kill them so quickly.” She got in the last word as Willie was obviously done arguing with her.

It is hard to know how far we should go to try to help some people when they have completely given themselves over to evil. Even God eventually gives people over to their own evil desires. Paul tells us, *“And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them over to an unfit mind and to do things that should not be done. They were filled with every kind of injustice, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, craftiness, they are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, rebellious toward parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. They know God’s decree, that those who practice such things deserve to die, yet they not only do them but even applaud others who practice them”* (Romans 1:28-32).

We reported the incident to Sheriff Crawford as we passed through Buffalo Gap. I am well known and respected enough in this town that they took my word for what happened and let us proceed with our trip. Sheriff Crawford did say the men’s bodies would be dug up and an investigation would be conducted. He told us to be ready to testify again in court if necessary. Angela and I talked about the killings. There are currently three modes of thought. Angela thought Willie should not have killed them as quickly as he did. Willie believed that he acted in self-defense and needed to do so as swiftly as possible. Since I was not there, in my head I am undecided. But my heart tells me to be grateful that Angela and Willie are still alive.

Back in Coleman, we discovered that Violet had a litter of puppies in our absence. Four of the pups are long-haired and look like wolf pups making it obvious that Rustler is the papa. Violet is a mixed Blue Healer with short hair. Four of her pups are just like her. All eight are precious, yet there are not enough to go around. It seems that everyone in town is in love with Rustler and Violet, and they all want one of their

offspring. Angela's sisters, Ruth and Judith, will get first picks. I would also like to give one to my father to help guard his ranch, and also to honor him for all that he has done for me.

All is quiet and content in Coleman as the Fall of 1879 approaches. Angela's family is doing well and enjoying their new house. Tent life was getting old for them. Saphronia Cooper (or Sophie as she is called) is seeing a recent widower named Clarence Goodman. He owns the local dry goods store where Angela worked. They seem to be pretty serious about their relationship. The girls like Clarence, and they love the huge house that Clarence lives in. They are pushing Sophie to get married. This would be her third marriage. After her first husband died in the war, she quickly remarried. Here on the frontier, it is generally thought that a woman needs a man to protect her and provide for the family. Her second husband left after Ruth and Judith were born. He headed west to look for gold and has never been heard from since.

With another man in their life, the girls are looking at me now more as a big brother rather than a father figure. What a relief! Ruth is feeling like a teenager of 13 should feel. She is interested in boys, and she talks of falling in love and getting married someday. Judith at 10 years of age is only interested in boys when it comes to beating them at any sport or activity that comes along. She is quite competitive.

Jeremiah's family is settling in quite well in Coleman. Jeremiah still works part-time for the blacksmith, but he is dedicating most of his time to preaching the Gospel. Rachel is over the Yellow Fever, and she is helping the Baptist preacher's wife with teaching the young ones in the local school. Once she was freed, Rachel was tutored extensively from members of her church who recognized her God-given talent to teach others. Their four children: Isaac (19), David (14), Esther (17), and Elizabeth (12) are all playing an active part in the community. Isaac works for the blacksmith, and Esther helps with the dry-goods store. David and Elizabeth are enjoying school and working around the house.

Isaac and Esther were born as slaves, but they were too young to have memories of it. David and Elizabeth were born free. The entire Anderson family has been declared full U.S. citizens under the 14th Amendment to the Constitution. Ratified

in 1868, the 14th Amendment defined African Americans as equal citizens under the law. Although their civil rights are protected by law, they still struggle from discrimination and bigotry of others.

Paul's family is becoming fully assimilated into the "white" society. I explained to Paul that he needed to select a last name (or a surname) for his family to help with the identification process. I explained that people in our society have surnames to help identify and track their lineage as a family for multiple generations. After much thought and discussion with his family, he chose "Hunter" as the surname. He explained that this name describes what his people do, and he wants to be known as a man who hunts for those who are lost. Paul continues to study Christian theology and wants to preach the Gospel to his people of the Comanche Nation. Angel continues to employ her medical skills in helping Angela with treating people in Coleman and the surrounding communities. Talako (age 11) hires himself out to local ranchers as a ranch hand, and he helps Paul with the family ranch. Talako's maturity and ranch skills are way beyond the abilities of boys nearly twice his age. Tanis (age 9) works in the local restaurant and sings for the diners when requested.

I praise God that Rachel and Angel are working together to create a home for orphaned children in the Coleman area. The harshness of the frontier has left many children without parents to care for them. Rachel and Angel have gathered volunteers who are building the orphanage, and they are lining up donations to help keep alive the dream of serving children who are alone in this world. Our community wants them to grow up loved and cared for until a permanent home can be found. We all feel the presence and support of God as we carry out this mission. God tells us to put our talents to use for His kingdom. The Parable of the Talents (**Matthew 25**) illustrates how God is pleased when we use our time and talents to further His kingdom on Earth. If we do this, at the end of our lives God will tell us, *"Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master"* (**Matthew 25:23**).

Church buildings are being built in Brownwood, Buffalo Gap, and Abilene. Currently, the buildings will be shared by several congregations. The Texas and Pacific

Railroad is building tracks to Abilene, and the talk is that Abilene will become the county seat for Taylor County soon. Buffalo Gap's population is approaching 1,000 people, and the town is flourishing as well. It seems that this circuit will not be wild for much longer. More people are settling and bringing many commerce opportunities with them. It is beginning to look like a Methodist circuit for this area will not be needed for much longer as towns are growing larger and beginning to desire preachers of their own. The citizens of Coleman continue to put pressure on me to quit the circuit and pastor the Methodist Church in Coleman exclusively. I keep putting that decision off, but Angela is much in favor of settling down and getting a family started.

Because of the terrible heat, August is often a time in Texas where preachers take a break from the circuit. While I was taking that break, Texas Ranger Henry Armstrong came to me with a request. It seems that a couple of trail drivers had cut some barbwire fence belonging to Tom Richardson just west of Coleman. They drove a good amount of cattle through the Triple R Ranch, and Tom was accusing those men of stealing some of his cattle on their way through. A vigilante group was being formed to catch those men and hang them from the highest tree. Henry wanted me, Paul, and Jeremiah to accompany him in catching up with the trail drivers before the vigilante group found them. He wanted some men of God to be there to help handle the vigilante group if needed.

Much to our wives' dismay, we told Henry we would go along. We mounted up and followed Paul. I have often said that Paul could track a ghost in the dark – he was that good. In this case, it was not hard to track a herd of cattle headed north. Paul estimated there were over 300 head in the herd. In no time, we came upon the drivers and Henry called upon them to stop for a talk. They respected the authority of the Texas Rangers, and they approached us without guns drawn. Perhaps it was also because they outnumbered our small band by at least 4:1.

The drivers admitted to cutting the fence, but they said that they purposely drove the cattle steadily through the land so they would not deplete the grass. Their defense was that they were in a hurry, and this was the straightest route to the nearest water hole. They had driven this trail many times before, and this was the first time they came

across barbed wire fencing. As it was late in the day, they did not want to bed the cattle down while they searched for someone to give them permission to cross.

As we talked, a group of men from Coleman rode up with guns drawn. With that, the drivers pulled their guns...and there the four of us were - right in the middle! I was quite nervous because over 40 guns were pointed in our direction from two different sides. If shooting started, we were goners. Henry identified to both groups that he represented the Texas Rangers and that he was the only one sanctioned by Texas to fire a gun in this situation.

I stood up in the stirrups of my saddle to make myself seen and made myself heard, "Men, I am asking all of you to put your guns down. We are here to find out what happened with the cutting of Mr. Richardson's fence and to seek compensation if necessary. I am asking you to allow Texas Ranger Armstrong to continue his investigation without harming these men. I can see by the ropes you are carrying that you are planning on some vigilante justice. Do not forget that the Lord our God tells us that He will provide justice." To my amazement the words of Hebrews came clearly to my mind, and I said, *"For we know him who said, It is mine to avenge; I will repay, and again, The Lord will judge his people"* (Hebrews 10:30). Men on both sides - do not take vengeance into your own hands. Let God and Ranger Armstrong handle this."

I did not want these good men of Coleman to become like the vigilante groups in the Dublin area that would track down and murder people based upon half-truths and rumors of wrongdoing. After all, the Bible tells us, *"God will bring into judgment both the righteous and the wicked, for there will be a time for every activity, a time to judge every deed"* (Ecclesiastes 3:17). My words must have been affective, as the men on both sides lowered their weapons. Henry asked both groups to retreat about 100 yards so he could talk to the leader of the drivers and Mr. Richardson in private.

As the men were turning their horses, some hot head from the vigilante group took a shot in our direction. Apparently luck was not on my side that day, as I felt a terrible jolt and burning in my left arm – the same arm I had broken not long ago. The force of the bullet knocked me off of Rahab. I don't know why everyone on both sides did not immediately start shooting after I fell. I can only believe that God sent angels to

halt the guns until we could implore everyone to remain calm. Jeremiah leaped to the ground and wrapped up my arm. He examined the wound and told me, "It is only a little scratch." Henry demanded that the man who fired the shot be tied up and arrested. The men from Coleman not only tied him up, but they also thrashed him fairly good for shooting their preacher.

Henry talked with the lead driver and Mr. Richardson, and they reached an understanding of how Mr. Richardson would be compensated and what would happen in the future with the cattle drivers. Everyone apologized to me for my being wounded. It all worked out surprisingly good in my mind...except that I had been shot and would have to face Angela. She warns me constantly about taking unnecessary chances. I hear her, but I have a sense of adventure which I feel impelled to follow. I have found that my effort to ensure that justice is delivered is often a dangerous road to travel.

As we headed back to Coleman, I thought how lucky I was to only receive a "scratch" on my arm. I was reminded of the scripture I often rely upon, *"For he will order his angels to protect you wherever you go. They will hold you up with their hands, so you won't even hurt your foot on a stone"* (Psalm 91:11-12).

Praise God for His infinite love and His angels.

Matt Stephen

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