

The Circuit Riders



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Learn these words:

Have you ever heard the old stories of the Wild West? You've probably read stories or watched television programs about the lives of men like Jesse James and Wyatt Earp, Billy the Kid and Annie Oakley. History tells us that people like Jesse, Wyatt, Billy and Annie made definite marks in our nation's history.

Did you also know that there were other famous people that tamed the Wild West not by the use of their guns but through the sacrifices of their daily lives? They had a passion for God and for His message of salvation to all mankind. These famous American Wild West tamers were called Circuit Riders.

Because the pioneer families of our great nation were widely separated by vast, uninhabited areas, it was impossible for frontier families to worship with their neighbors and friends. Hearing the good news of Jesus Christ was difficult for these men, women and children, because people who lived in the Wild West spent their days in lonely areas where they were rarely able to meet new people.

So in the 1800's the Circuit Riders, those men who listened to the call of God, who took their cues from their Creator, made the decision to sacrifice their own lives and their own conveniences to make certain that the people of the frontier heard God's messages to

mankind. These men sold all that they had to buy a pony. They packed their new pony down with lightly-stuffed saddlebags containing only the bare minimum of articles to sustain them on their long journeys.

The Circuit Riders risked their lives traveling on horseback over bumpy roads, through dangerous forests, over rough mountains, and across rushing rivers.

They came from several religious denominations: Baptist, Presbyterian, Catholic, Methodist and many others. Every three to six weeks they covered a circle of small towns that were located hundreds of miles apart. It was because they rode in

circles that they came to be known as Circuit Riders. These circuit riders on horseback lived on a salary of less than fifty dollars a year.

Circuit Riders traveled on the backs of their ponies for hours, and days, and weeks under horrible conditions. They rarely had time to wash or bathe. They had little time to prepare healthy meals. They often rode on rain-soaked roads that were so soggy that their horses sank in slop and their legs as well as the legs of their horses were knee-deep in wet mud.

Yet they continued to travel this earth with the message that their Redeemer lives. It was said they refused to “talk the talk” and chose, instead, to “walk the walk.” These brave

preachers created roads where none existed and crossed over steep, rocky mountains in order to reach more and more people for God.



If they came to a river where there was no bridge, they swam their horse across the water. Many times, their feet and legs bled and swelled from cuts and bruises. Often they

were nearly drowned by angry, swollen, rushing waters.

Whether they were sleeping or traveling, their conditions were rarely comfortable. They slept in the woods, in rat-infested cabins, and in damp caves. They traveled for days in blinding snow storms, pounding rain, and horrible heat with nothing to eat. They rode in dark forests full of dangerous murderers, threatening thieves, hungry wolves, brutal bears, and poisonous snakes.

Circuit Riders were filled with mercy and good will toward others. If they met someone who needed a cloak or food or money, these riders

gave whatever they had to another man or woman in need. If they met someone who was ill, these men of God sacrificed their last medication to bring about healing.



These servants of the Wild West demanded nothing from others while their own bodies were often racked with pain, illness, fever,

hunger, and weakness. Instead of crying out for rest, they combed towns and territories searching for those who thirsted for the peace and rest that only the Savior offers.

The Circuit riders did not learn to preach in college classrooms. They rarely wrote polished sermons. They simply preached whatever God said was wrong or right for the everyday lives of the people. Whether they were preaching to a child or preaching to an adult, they built their sermon messages upon their own experiences with God and upon the changes God's Word brought about daily in their own everyday lives.



Those to whom they preached saw their willingness to suffer for the sake of the Gospel. Throughout the Wild West, crowds flocked to hear the Circuit Riders preach. Many of their meetings were held under a brush arbor or in a canvas tent. They preached in camp meetings, in tavern barrooms, in pioneer cabins, in school houses, in fields, and in any other setting where hungry hearts and listening ears came together.

The joy of winning souls to the Lord remained their chief goal. They spoke God's hope to women with empty purses and to men with empty lives. Our nation's Circuit Riders were full of the joy of

the Lord in spite of the fact that many of them died quite young.

Thank the Lord for the Circuit Riders!
They were God's men -- men who rode and preached and tamed the old Wild West.



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