

## **Christian Men in a “Lonesome Dove” World**

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### **A Lonesome Dove World**

- Pulitzer prizewinning novel (1985) and miniseries (1989) with Robert Duval and Tommy Lee Jones
- story of Texas Rangers who gather cowboys to drive cattle up to Montana to establish a ranch in 1876
- my favorite was Louis L'Amour, lots of gritty characters, defiance of the odds, the beauty and danger of the landscape, making and breaking men
- characters are larger-than-life, lots of humor, adventure, romance, action, suspense
- but also calamity, cruelty, death—the old West was not a place of romantic nostalgia but of blighted hopes and dreams
- the usefulness of the Western is that it functions as a mirror to men (and women) in our own time—the wilderness is still there, but it exists spiritually within civilization, within the city, within corporations, with our friends and our families, within the hearts and minds of men and women
- there are times we might feel like the flawed heroes of Lonesome Dove or a Louis L'Amour novel, like John Wayne or Clint Eastwood, making our way through a dangerous world, not sure of where we're headed or how or if we will get there in the end
- not many of us would call the California of today a paradise, but in the 19<sup>th</sup> C it might have seemed to be just that... perfect weather, fortunes to be made, plenty of space for everyone, etc.
- the journey to California or Oregon or wherever is a symbol of the hopes that lie deep within every human heart... the sense that our true home lies beyond the horizon, where surely life is better, where we can prosper and find the freedom to be ourselves, to be free from the things that hold us back in our current life, where the sun always shines and the living is easy
- this same theme lies at the center of all Biblical narrative; except instead of longing for California, the longing is for the Promised Land and ultimately the heavenly Jerusalem, and instead of travelling through the prairies and deserts of the American West, it's a sojourn through the wastelands of Sinai; instead of being threatened by the Cherokee, the threats are foreign armies and spiritual forces; etc.

### **“Strangers and Pilgrims”**

- the great theme is one of pilgrimage, sojourn; as St Peter tells us, we are “strangers and pilgrims” (1 Pet 2.11) in this world, and our tale is one of exile and return
- think Adam and Eve, cast out of Eden into the wilderness of the wider, hostile world, longing to return

- think of the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the sons of Israel—sojourning in strange lands, in hope of God's gracious promises
- think of the Exodus, Moses leading the people of Israel out of Egyptian slavery, through 40 years in the wilderness, to the Promised Land
- even after they arrive in the Land, they don't really possess it until the come of David generations later; but as we saw last year, even David himself had to spend years in the wilderness, with only a few friends and constantly pursued by his enemies, before he himself was able to come to his throne
- even until now, this journey is reenacted by the Jews in their pilgrim festivals, Passover, etc
- even their later exile from the Promised Land and their captivity in Babylon—the hope of return to the Promised Land survives, and comes to be perhaps the distinctive feature of Jewish life
- In the NT, the infant Christ and his family are forced to flee to Egypt to escape the jealous rage of Herod, and only later are they allowed to return home, in a divinely-arranged reenactment of the exodus of Israel
- Christ spends time in the desert, tempted by Satan, before he begins his ministry
- and think of Christ's wanderings in Israel, "the Son of Man hath nowhere to lay his head" (Mt 8, Lk 9, etc), he's constantly in motion without home or family, until his final entrance into Jerusalem. "Then he took unto him the twelve, and said unto them, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished. 32 For he shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on: 33 And they shall scourge him, and put him to death: and the third day he shall rise again." (Lk 18.31-32)
- In Christ's journey up to Jerusalem, Israel's history of pilgrimage attains its spiritual goal, and is thus truly fulfilled
- and notice, just as Israel was dispersed and taken to Babylon, the disciples are dispersed after Christ's death, going to the ends of the earth to seek out God's people, and through the preaching of the Gospel to bring them home again... but not home to an earthly city this time, but to a heavenly city
- Notice how Paul describes his apostolic sojourn, seeking out the lost sheep of Israel:
- "in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, 5 In stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings; 6 By pureness, by knowledge, by long suffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned, 7 By the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, 8 By honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report: as deceivers, and yet true; 9 As unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and, behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed; 10 As sorrowful, yet alway rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things." (2 Cor 6.4-10)
- and later on,
- 24 Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. 25 Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; 26 In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; 27 In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness." (2 Cor 11.24-27)

## Following Christ, the Stranger

- In Christ's journey up to Jerusalem, our own pilgrimage is begun
- it is the peculiar vocation of Christians to be "strangers and pilgrims" in this world
- rehearse the history once again, Heb 11:13-16
- 13 These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. 14 For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. 15 And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. 16 But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.
- As St Augustine says in the City of God, Book 14: "Two loves have made two cities. Love of self, even to the point of contempt for God, made the earthly city; and love of God, even to the point of contempt of self, made the heavenly city" (civ. Dei XIV.28)
- the human life is a tale of two cities, and one's final destination. Wherein do our hopes lie?
- The human being is *viator*, whether he knows it or not... the Christian not only knows it, but he knows which road he is on, and where he is growing: Christ is the way, the truth, and the life, and our way is to our homeland, our *patria*, union with his Father, and ours
- we are not meant to make our home in this world... explain perversity of resting on the way
- the dangers and cruelty and failures we experience along the way have at the very least this saving benefit: they prevent us from feeling that this world is our home, and things are ok as they are, that we've reached our final destination
- however, the Christian wayfarer is not against this world, he is not its enemy, even if at times it might think he is its enemy... but truth be told, the wayfarer is the world's friend, if only it would listen to him—his persistent and dogged faith, hope, and charity testify to the existence of our true homeland, that country far away
- Jer 29.4-7
- 4 Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, unto all that are carried away captives, whom I have caused to be carried away from Jerusalem unto Babylon; 5 Build ye houses, and dwell in them; and plant gardens, and eat the fruit of them; 6 Take ye wives, and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons, and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters; that ye may be increased there, and not diminished. 7 And seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the Lord for it: for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace.
- if time, explore Gen 12.1-9
- Abram begins his journey, leaving his old life for the sake of the new, promised life
- prompted by the Word of God
- faith—as seen in his obedience, his getting up and going
- hope—keeps him going on
- charity—worship and caring for his family
- even after his death he is told that his descendants would have trouble

- In the Men's Forum this year, we're going to spend some time with this theme, that of the Christian man as wayfarer in a strange and hostile place: where are we going, and how do we get there?

**What do we need to get there?**

- First, we need wisdom: think of wisdom as the map and compass. Only the man who has mastered the truth of God, who can see the world as God intends for us to see it, who knows where we're going, can get himself and his family there in one piece. If not, you're going to wander aimlessly and die out in the wilderness for lack of water or by getting lost along the way and overcome by hostile forces
- Second, wisdom isn't enough: you've also got to have good judgment, the ability to see things for what they are, according to the map. You've got to be able to find out where you are at the moment in relation to the map, you've got to know the landscape, you've got to be able to see the signs of approaching danger. You've got to know the route you'll travel, when to camp for the night, when to set out in the morning, when to circle the wagons for defense.
- These are some of the things we're going to try and provide you with this year, to help you make sense of the landscape we all find ourselves in