

Interview with Pastor John Paul, God's Country Cowboy Church

Interviewer: Haley Claxton (**HC**), University of Kansas, Dept. of Religious Studies Intern

Interviewee: John Paul (**JP**), Pastor of God's Country Cowboy Church

Location: God's Country Cowboy Church, Veteran's Building in Coldwater, Kansas

Date : July 6, 2015

Time: 8:15 PM

Length: 00:07:50

Transcriber: Haley Claxton

Abstract: Oral history interview with John Paul conducted by Haley Claxton at God's Country Cowboy Church in Coldwater, Kansas, on June 28, 2015. This interview features Pastor John Paul of God's Country Cowboy Church. Pastor Paul discusses his entry into ministry, and what he sees that defines Cowboy Church. This interview was conducted for the Religion in Kansas Project as part of a summer fieldwork internship funded by the Friends of the Department of Religious Studies.

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HC: Hi this is Haley here with Pastor John Paul at God's Country Cowboy Church.

JP: Yeah.

HC: Tell me a little bit about yourself before we get into talking about this ministry here.

JP: Well—I was born into the cattle industry and I've been around cattle and horses my whole life. And as I—I was raised in a conservative Christian home but like many—most of us—I went and tried things my own way as a young man, but as that didn't work very well I was drawn back to the Lord in my late twenties and as I was going to church more, and learning more, and startin' to study, I was—aware that He wanted me to start sharing the Gospel. At first it really intimidated me because I didn't understand how that could work with my lack of education—formal education—and I wasn't a speaker at the time. I never public spoke. I had this calling in my heart and I knew it was to Western people and so then we—after several years—it didn't just happen, but I knew it was comin'—and one day I saw a guy preachin' and he had a very unique personality and I

understood at that point in time that I wasn't called to be some of the great evangelists I knew, like Billy Graham. I was called to be John Paul, and do it as John Paul would do it. And from then it got its start. And I started doing horse shows and rodeos and—Western events of all sorts, and from there eventually it grew to this ministry here.

HC: So, tell me a little bit about how this ministry got started here in Coldwater.

JP: The way it got started here in Coldwater was two-fold. There was two people—one of 'em— is deceased now and his brand is actually at the top of the podium there—that two circle, bar. His name is Chuck Brass, and I was helping him do some ranch work, which is what I do for a living, and he had cancer and he was famous around here for being wild. Very wild. And he come to me one day. He says, "My wife thinks I need to start goin' to church." He says, "But I've been to 'em, and I'm not very interested in it, but if you would start somethin', I'll come." And I had already been feelin' like I was supposed to and that really encouraged me. And the other thing that happened was, there's a young couple that's not here tonight, but they're here usually, and they had a wedding—and by the end of the wedding, I'd got to know so many local people, and through that performance, there's just over and over again, people just kept saying "we just wish we could have something like this every week." And so about two weeks after that, we started here and we've been going ever since.

HC: So, when did you get started then?

JP: We started October, a year ago.

HC: And so how big would you say the congregation is?

JP: Our average is about sixty, but it bounces from thirty-five or forty to a hundred. You never know from week to week really.

[00:03:44]

HC: And what do you think it is that draws people here?

JP: I think the number one thing is that it's comfortable. They can come as they are. Like tonight—there was a fella' with a puppy, ya know, and if there's something—that they don't understand, we just have a conversation, right then. We'll just work through it one-on-one, but, like, everyone is involved. It's just very comfortable and I think that's the biggest drawing card.

HC: So it's really difficult, I think, to understand some of the Bible sometimes. How do you translate Bible into what people can deal with and wrap their heads around?

JP: The—I pray about it, and it's very interesting. I too struggle. If I'm just reading the Bible for the purpose of my own education, it has—some of it's intriguing. But when I start reading the Bible for the purpose of teaching others? It comes to life. The Holy Spirit intercedes and it's amazing how much more life—and it just jumps out at me. It's interesting when it happens like that and I can be very confident that it's real and true, where as if I'm studying on my own, and I'm understanding in my own knowledge and power, it could be flawed.

HC: Is there a particular affiliation or denomination that this church is sort of with, or—

JP: No, we're our own entity and I feel very strongly that we're not to be a part of one of them; we're to be a part of all of them. And as much as I feel strong about—that I'm to witness to Western people, I also feel a spirit of unity that we're to encourage and help all the churches—of Christian faith and that we're all part of the same church really.

[00:06:10]

HC: So why do you think that Kansas particularly is a good place for a church like this?

JP: Because it's a Western culture. Because it's full of people that live a Western lifestyle, so something a little less structured and a little more comfortable and if you can do it in the dirt or in the grass, it's even better. Western people are just comfortable in that setting.

HC: So what do you see as kind of the future for this Cowboy Church, or Cowboy Church in general across the state of Kansas, and across the United States?

JP: You know—and I don't know for sure—but I know that there's no doubt in my mind that many many lives will be changed. And when other churches are shrinking, Cowboy Churches are growing, and statistically speaking, even traditional churches are strong to women and Cowboy Churches are actually a lot stronger to men, and I don't know why that is other than that the Holy Spirit seems to bless it that way, and that men like the comfort of it all, so I expect that it's just going to get bigger and stronger and I expect we will see a lot more of them.

HC: Alright, thank you.

[00:07:50]

[End of Recording]