

November 17, 2024

“Birthpangs”

Mark 13:5-8

5 Then Jesus began to say to them, "Beware that no one leads you astray.

6 Many will come in my name and say, 'I am he!' and they will lead many astray.

7 When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come.

8 For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. This is but the beginning of the birthpangs.



Special Music:

“One Tin Soldier”

The Original Caste

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AAe4oyRkLdY>

A MOMENT IN TIME

It was a chilly morning in Parable, TX as the crowd gathered at the new city park. The temperature had dropped to 35 degrees overnight, so most of the townsfolk were bundled up in heavy coats as they talked and laughed while looking at the copper and porcelain cylinder on the platform in the center of the park. This was a historic moment for the small town in central Texas. Calvin Coolidge had just been elected after having ascended to the presidency when Warren G. Harding passed away. The winds of change were in the air along with the smells of autumn, a prelude to the coming holidays. Many of the people had brought small tokens, treasured items and bits of history to be shared with those who would dig up this very capsule on November 24, 2024. The mayor had asked his constituents not to bring big items. There was only so much that would fit in the capsule container.

The City Council had set aside funds to have the capsule made to their specifications. Inside the main chamber, there were five containers, each marked with a different year. The first was for 1924 and the rest for the next four centuries. That meant that when the capsule was dug up in 2024, if all went as anticipated, only the first container would contain the treasures that the people had brought with them to share with future generations.

As cold as it was, it remained a festive occasion. The committee had managed to scrape up enough musicians to have a small, if somewhat unusual band. There was a tuba player, a slide trombone, a fiddler, an autoharp, a clarinet, a guitar, a washtub bass, and a bass drum, which made for some enthusiastic,

but unique renditions of “The Wreck of the Old 97”, “Death of Floyd Collins”, “Mama Will Be Gone”, Hard Hearted Hannah”, “The Prisoner’s Song”, and a flurry of hymns thrown in. There were a few street vendors and a clown giving away balloons. Ladies wore their big-brimmed hats and children scurried in and out amongst the crowd playing chase and Hide-N-Seek.

Franklin Peabody, the current mayor, stepped up on the platform near the capsule and used a megaphone to bring the people to order. A brass container was on a table beside him that would receive the items the people had brought to preserve for posterity.

Franklin signaled the for band to stop playing and slowly the music petered out and ended with a last loud blat from the tuba. Holding the megaphone to his mouth, he shouted, “Ladies and Gentleman! Yes, you children as well. Pay attention now. We are about to begin!” The crowd settled to whispers and moved closer to the platform. “I know you are all excited, but we need to do this in an orderly manner, so I ask for your full cooperation. Those of you who have items to place in the container, please form a line to my right, and it would be helpful if everyone else would step back a little. I know you are all on pins and needles to see what people are bringing, but please don’t crowd anyone out.”

Those with items quickly moved into line. There were more of them than the mayor had believed would participate, but he would do his best to accommodate everyone. “As I call your name, please let me know what you have brought so that I can announce it to everyone.”

Mavis Parker was the first in line and had a small poster in her hand. "Mavis, what is it you have there?" inquired the mayor. Mavis unrolled the poster. It was a 'Vote for La Follete' poster. 1924 was the year that women had gained the right to vote, and Mavis had been the head of the local women's suffrage group which had supported Robert M. La Follette, the progressive candidate from the Democratic Party. At the sight of the poster, groans went up from the men in the crowd, some raising their voices and other's their fists. Sheriff Talbert shouted for everyone to settle down. After all, Coolidge had won the election so what did it really matter. Mavis rolled the poster back up and put it in the container, then walked stiffly off the platform, her nose in the air. Several women in the group politely applauded as she stepped down.

"Jackson Carson, you're up next," called the mayor. "What are you going to leave for those good folks in 2024?"

Jackson was the local banker. He was tall and slender and wearing his best suit, top hat, and cane. He held his object up to the crowd. "Franklin," he said in his loudest voice so he could be heard, "I have here in my hand a freshly minted, Saint Saint-Gaudens Double Eagle \$20 gold piece." Quiet ooos and ahhs spread through the crowd.

"Now that is a real treasure," the mayor said as Jackson dropped the coin with a metallic clink into the container. "Thank you, Jackson."

Jackson turned to leave the platform and Bobby Jenkins rushed past him with excitement. "My turn! My turn!" Bobby was 10, but the committee had

placed no age limit on the contributors. They wanted everyone, including the children, to be represented.

Bobby lifted his hand in the air, and everyone could see that he had a toad. “This is Jezebel, my pet toad. I want her to meet the folks in 2024 when they open this here container!” He started to place the frog into the brass receptacle with the other items.

“Whoa there, Bobby Boy!” said the mayor patiently. “Now that’s a nice sentiment and that’s a nice toad you have there, but I don’t think Jezebel is going to fare very well if she can’t breathe. Maybe you should hold onto her. Do you have something else you want to give that maybe doesn’t need to breath now and then?”

Bobby searched his pockets and pulled out a Nehi Grape Soda bottle cap he was saving for his collection. “How about this, mayor Peabody?” as he held it up for inspection.

“That would be just fine, Bobby. Put it in the container and then hurry back to your parents. And be sure you take Jezebel with you!” Bobby smiled and dropped the bottle cap in the container and rushed off the stage. There was a bit of laughter throughout the crowd, and Bobby’s parents were laughing the hardest at the shenanigans of their son.

Dwayne Sanders, editor of the Parable Gazette, added a copy of the current newspaper to the accumulating stash. Steven Jaspers, a local farmer who also did wood carving, dropped in a wooden crucifix he had been working on.

Madeline Jeffries gave a crocheted doily she had finished just the day before. Patton Arbuckle, the photographer for the Gazette, added a photo of the capsule that he had taken the day before. Little Jessica Stanton gave up her corn cob doll and her big brother put in his favorite marble, a blue shooter with a green center. Doc Pritchard donated his new 78 of Carl Fenton's Orchestra playing, 'Who's izzy is he?' Judith Hemple included a receipt for a week's worth of groceries for her and her family that came to \$1.65. Bill Williams put in a photo of him standing next to his new Model T from Ford, and James Whitiker, the local Pharmacist, dropped in a bottle of over-the-counter heroin.

"Good for all that ails you," he shouted to the crowd.

Someone else added a pack of cigarettes from the new company Marlboro. There was a box of Kleenex, a pair of locking pliers, a Bit-O-Honey candy, all new things on the market in 1924. The sheriff put in a cartridge from his Colt 45. There were matchboxes, flyers, a mail-order catalog, a Wheaties box, a small teapot, and a ticket from the Texas State Fair.

Salvador Jacobs was the last one in line. He had just recently paid off the mortgage on his house, and rather than ceremonially burning it, he chose to place it in the container with everything else.

"\$7,900 dollars, bought and paid for," he shouted to the crowd with a toothless grin! It had been a good year for everyone in Parable, TX. The economy was looking up and they had so much to be thankful for.

Reverend Myers, the minister from local Presbyterian Church, joined the mayor on the platform and offered up a prayer of Thanksgiving and a blessing for those who would open the capsule in 2024. Little did anyone know about what was to come in the next five years. The stock market would crash in October of 1929, and not long after that, the world would see the rise of Fascism in Germany as, once again, the world would be dragged, kicking and screaming, into a senseless and relentless war. But for right now, at this moment in time in Parable, Texas, life was pretty much perfect.

Later in the day, as the crowd dwindled away, a crew came in to put the container into the capsule. They then lowered the capsule into the concrete lined receptacle that they had prepared. The men placed the large rock on top of the hole and added the plaque. Everyone hoped the people of Parable, Texas in 2024 would see what had mattered most to them as they prepared for what they believed would be a bright future.

For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. This is but the beginning of the birthpangs.

Whenever something new is being born into the world, there are birthpangs. Hardships. Painful moments. Stress. Expended energy. Sweatequity. Whether it is starting a new business, or the birth of an idea, or the implementation of a new concept or system, it's hard. It's difficult. Change is difficult. 20% of all new businesses will fail within their first two years and only 25% will still be flourishing after 15 years. Giving birth to a new business or idea is painful and requires tremendous amounts of energy. That's why it is referred to as Birthpangs. The most difficult natural occurrence for humans is something that men will never experience, giving birth. The reference to birthpangs is not a trivial statement. Ask any woman who has ever given birth to a child. And should you try to trivialize it, you'd better be prepared to face punishment to come. Pursuing a new venture requires money, tenacity, patience, people skills, and a driving desire to make it work, no matter what.

Michael Jordan said, "I have missed over 9,000 shots in my career. I have lost almost 300 games. On 26 occasions I have been entrusted to take the game winning shot, and I have missed. I have failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed."

So very often, success is determined not by luck or some supernatural blessing, but instead by strong work ethics and countless hours of dedication. And yes, we often fail multiple times before we succeed. Forbes magazine says that Thomas Edison went through over 10,000 prototypes before he was finally able to create a commercially viable light bulb. His reply to that statement was “I have not failed 10,000 times – I have successfully found 10,000 ways it will not work.” Birthpangs are necessary for achievement. For moving forward. For eventually finding success.

Humans are prone to failure. It is a growth process. Let’s face it, all of us need to have opportunities to fail to make room for growth. We often cannot find success without multiple failures. We need to learn how not to do something before we figure out what will work. We need to allow ourselves the grace to fail so that we can do better the next time.

We see the chaos and the devastation in the world around us. We see earthquakes, floods, hurricanes, tornados, mudslides, most of which occur without intervention. Then we see the travesties we ourselves have caused, war, pestilence, pollution, anger, pain, and suffering. And it is difficult not to dwell on those things. But sometimes, what we are viewing and participating in can be taken out of context for what is really going on.

We cry out that people are poor and starving like it is some kind of new thing. But Jesus tells us in Matthew 26:11: **“The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me.”** In truth, poverty has always been with us and will always be with us. That should not diminish our compassion. What it should do is

inflamm our compassion to do more, even though we know that we will never be able to completely irradicate poverty and the anguish that comes with it. God still calls us to strive towards ending poverty and injustice in the world.

As much as we struggle to bring about world peace, there has never been a time in human culture where there was no conflict somewhere in the world. Even the Garden of Eden had its conflict. Greed and intolerance are a human constant if left unchecked, which in and of itself, creates more conflict.

There is always a disaster happening somewhere. Living frail human lives on this planet earth brings the daily possibility of disaster. In many ways, we struggle more with this today than in the past because we are bombarded with the images of the aftermath, the destruction of human life and property. We simply cannot escape it.

Even today, the population of the United States is being close to being split between dread for the next few years and jubilation for the same few years. It's a different kind of angst, but it is still relevant to us as Christians trying to find a medium where we can all live without fear, where we can all come to the table with grace in our hearts.

“Preacher, you aren’t saying anything we don’t know. But what has that got to do with today’s scripture?”

For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. This is but the beginning of the birthpangs.

The problem is that we are so engaged in the pain that we don't notice the outcome. We don't see that the pain was necessary for us to move forward as a civilization. We see the bleeding child in the mud, but we don't see the fireman that picks up that child and takes them someplace that they can get medical attention. We see the houses destroyed by fire or floods which make us weep with compassion, but we don't see the army of volunteers that show up to help rebuild those houses. We see the result of bombed out cities and villages, but we fail to see the humanitarians that rush in with food, medicine, and skills to help alleviate the suffering. Those heroes are on the peripheral side of our vision, and they seldom draw our focus, unless conflict keeps them from doing what they came to do. Our attention will be drawn to the good things we see as long as there are no travesties to distract us.

We may find this at odds with our story today, but we need to look at the circumstances. In 1924, the future for our sleepy little town of Parable, TX, was looking pretty bright and they wanted to celebrate by giving something back, a time capsule for future generations. But, in other news, there were no less than 25 wars happening at that time in the world. Eastern Europe was still recovering from the aftermath of World War 1. Here in the good old USA, we saw the end of the Apache wars, but the beginning of a new type of war brought about by Prohibition. Al Capone was at war with the constabulary of Chicago and Lucky Luciano was the kingpin in New York. So, not everything was a bed of roses. Peace for some places meant unrest and conflict in other places.

But the people of Parable chose to look on the bright side and show the citizens of Parable in 2024 the opportunity to get a glimpse of their laid-back and prosperous lifestyle in 1924. They were excited about sharing. And while what they chose to put in that capsule might seem so very simple for us today, they were things of importance to residents of Parable at that time. I'm pretty sure that the people in Parable in 2024 were fascinated with the simple things that offered up as a picture for what life was like the century before. The people of 1924 had seen years of pain and suffering and what they chose to show the future was how bright things were looking at that moment, the excitement they felt moving forward. They were not dwelling on the past.

Birthpangs are so important. They bring hope for a better tomorrow, a more positive future. They bring the presence of new life and the promise of things to come. Without those pangs we are doomed to repeat our mistakes over, and over, and over again, without ever seeing the result, without ever stepping into the joy that God has prepared for us. When we come to accept the necessity of those pangs and what it means for our growth, the world tends to get brighter. Ask any parent or grandparent how bright the world looks when a newborn baby enters the world.

When we see people serving as the hands and feet of Jesus, we find hope in the blessings. It isn't about what caused the need, but how we can alleviate the need. When we visualize Jesus hanging on the cross and saying, "Forgive them Father, for they do not know what they are doing," that moment brings the love of God for us into focus. When we step into the purpose God has laid out for

us, we find joy in the pangs knowing that God is bringing us to something new and wonderful.

Birthpangs are only the beginning of something new and great to come. Let your eyes wander to the peripheral of your vision and see God at work, creating new life for all of us. With thanksgiving, let us step into the blessings that he has prepared for us.

God bless you all.

AMEN

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