

Mark 4

Written by K B Napier
Monday, 23 August 2010 09:30

"And they feared exceedingly, and said one to another, What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

In this final verse of the chapter, the inexplicable nature of Christ is shown in the awed reaction of the disciples to His miracle. Yes, critics will say the sea and wind just dropped of their own accord. And yes, that is a possibility. But, what makes it a miracle, something outside normal laws of physics, is the simple fact that the calming of the sea and wind was instant, immediately following Christ's command.

In itself, a correlation (wind, sea, storm, calming) has no proven link whatever to their calming. But, the link to the cause (Christ's command) is direct and instant. That is what makes it a miracle and not a natural phenomenon. Others will say it is nothing but nonsense. But, locals at the time could have verified the storm and even the calming, and the disciples would also have known the facts. If there was a dispute it would have stopped this portion of Mark being recorded, or even passed on verbally at the time.

This, then, was the man everyone was following. They saw his miracles, many of them, and heard His amazing dialogue. This was no ordinary man. As we have seen, the national leaders, Pharisees and scribes, also knew of His power, but His presence was an inconvenience to their own careers, finances and authority, so, they plotted His downfall. Even in everyday life this goes on daily. The proof of hatred for truth is in the way critics are not content to just criticize – they have to destroy and remove! They cannot win their arguments so they get rid of the one causing their inner distress.

We also see in this chapter Jesus' use of parables, which contradicts the superficial Christian's ideas of Jesus as only 'meek and mild'. He used parables specifically to confound some, whose hearts were far from Him. Like all who are unbelievers, they were intellectually adept, but spiritually dead. So, with the best will in the world, they could never understand Christians, or their Bible. That is why it is pointless to argue with unbelievers... they have no idea what they are talking about.

Never be put out by critics, Never argue with them, because they will just keep on and on about things they have no clue about. This is not arrogance, but straightforward saving of time and effort. Just tell them the truth, and leave it there.

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Verse 1

1.

And he began again to teach by the sea side: and there was gathered unto him a great multitude, so that he entered into a ship, and sat in the sea; and the whole multitude was by the sea on the land.

Jesus remained in the general Capernaum area, and continued to be mobbed by massive crowds. On a previous occasion the crowd were so enthusiastic they pushed Him and the disciples into the water. With the same density of people, Jesus this time spoke from a ship just off shore, leaving the crowd on shore.

There are times when ministers receive plentiful praise from newcomers to their websites and literature. However, I know this can be very short-lived! No preacher of God should allow praise to turn his head. After all, see what happened to the best preacher Who ever walked this earth! Adulation by the crowds disappeared in just two and a half years time. It is true that Jesus still had His followers in Jerusalem when He was crucified, but they either faded into the background fearing the same fate, or were so few as to have their voices drowned out.

The lesson for today's preachers is – think nothing of praise by people, for people are fickle. No preacher should ever accrue praise anyway! Yet, I know that many ministries actually boast of how many people sing their praises, and work on it to produce even more. They say all the right things, to ensure people continue to praise them. The preacher should just speak as he is led, whether it brings praise or condemnation. It is the only true way to conduct a ministry. It is how Christ and the Apostles worked, and that is good enough for me!

Verse 2-9

1.

And he taught them many things by parables, and said unto them in his doctrine,

2.

Hearken; Behold, there went out a sower to sow:

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3.

And it came to pass, as he sowed, some fell by the way side, and the fowls of the air came and devoured it up.

4.

And some fell on stony ground, where it had not much earth; and immediately it sprang up, because it had no depth of earth:

5.

But when the sun was up, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away.

6.

And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up, and choked it, and it yielded no fruit.

7.

And other fell on good ground, and did yield fruit that sprang up and increased; and brought forth, some thirty, and some sixty, and some an hundred.

8.

And he said unto them, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

This next portion of scripture will not be unduly expanded upon, because Christ Himself gives the meaning of it in a later portion. Of note is the fact that Jesus used parables. Almost any Christian you ask will say Jesus used parables as an aid to understanding, but this is a distortion of the truth. (See previous treatment of 'parables' and the next section).

Parables have a distinct role in Jesus' teachings. Here, He "taught many things by parables" and yet teaching was what most of His hearers did not understand (or want)! The main parable

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He used on this day was part of His “doctrine” (see article on Doctrine). Or, simply, what He taught.

Parables were commonplace amongst Jewish teachers and rabbis. They would take up a common theme, known to all their hearers, and teach a specific aspect of God’s word through it. In some cases, the parables had an instant response of recognition from the hearers. But, in this instance, Jesus did not intend for his hearers to understand.

The parable was based on something they all understood – sowing and reaping. A sower went out to sow seeds. In those days and for hundreds of years afterwards, sowers scattered their seeds by broadcasting – throwing them out in a fan-shape. Obviously, this was hit-and-miss, for some seeds would take root, whilst others would not. This is the thrust of Jesus’ statements: some seeds were eaten by birds; some fell on shallow earth so only grew so far before dying; some were amongst thorns, whose rabid growth choked the growing plants, which could not then bear fruit; but some fell on good ground and grew as they should.

Jesus finished telling the parable and then said: “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.” Though not immediately recognizable as such, this end-statement is about predestination. As scripture says, until we are regenerated we are dead in sin because our spirit is dead. The dead cannot hear. Therefore, only those who are regenerated can hear, and this is what Jesus was saying: ‘Those who are born again must listen’.

Verses 10-12

1.

And when he was alone, they that were about him with the twelve asked of him the parable.

2.

And he said unto them, Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables:

3.

That seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand; lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them.

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Later, “when He was alone” with the 12 disciples, “they that were about him” asked Jesus what his parable meant. It is probable that a mature Christian who is familiar with scripture could nowadays give a good explanation of the parable. But, those unfamiliar would not. So, some asked Jesus what the meaning was.

Jesus’ reply is obviously not well known even today, for few Christians understand what a parable is really for. Yes, it *can* be an ‘earthly story with a heavenly meaning’. But, this is only partly true. Jesus now gives the other explanation. He told His disciples, and possibly some amongst the ‘others’, that they were given the ability to understand the “mystery of the kingdom of God”. In this text “given”, *didōmi*, means they were given a gift of something necessary and to their advantage. That is, the ability to understand the mystery of the kingdom.

By “mystery” is meant something previously hidden, a secret. Such secrets are only made known to a few, those who are saved. Others cannot understand, even if they can read or hear the same words. It has nothing to do with intelligence, but with having the spiritual ‘key’ given by the Holy Spirit. There is no point whatever in the unsaved understanding what God says, for they cannot use it and do not inherit Heaven. Therefore, only the saved are given the gift of understanding what God says.

What is this “mystery”? It is how to be accepted by God and how to live a righteous life, which is essential for being part of the “kingdom of God”. The kingdom is, of course, not an earthly rule, but Heavenly. It is to do with spiritual, not material, things. And it is a kingdom owned by God and not divulged to anyone else. So, the unsaved would retort that it is a ‘circular argument’ to claim that only the saved can understand what God says in His word. But, it is a fact! The unsaved are completely out of the equation; they have no understanding, even if they read or hear exactly the same words as those who are saved. It is just how it is!

Jesus said the saved will understand, but: “unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables.” To be ‘without’ means to be outside the kingdom, or, unsaved, not Christians. For unbelievers, then, Jesus speaks in parables. Basically, a parable is a comparison of one thing with another. Paul uses a very similar idea when he gives two extremes in a teaching, which is a rabbinical teaching method.

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Most Christians think Jesus wanted to make things easier for the people, by using parables. Not so! Quite the opposite! He said “That seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand; lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins be forgiven them.”

The use of parables with certain hearers was to keep the mystery of salvation *hidden* from them. They could clearly hear what was said, but did not understand. Only those who were to be saved, or were saved, could understand the meanings. In this case, then, a parable was really a judgment upon those who were not elect. As those not really interested in salvation, they would not understand, and did not care anyway.

Another thing this text proves is that genuine believers, those actually saved by grace, will understand what God says and will not always seek to find meanings. At first they may be slow because of inexperience, but they will rapidly begin to understand everything God says. Those who are only pretenders will constantly not understand, but will try and maintain a Christian-like stance.

To be “converted” in the text means to turn from sin to God, to worship Him. It is a part of genuine repentance, when we turn *from* sin and *to* God. Just repenting is of no use – that is what the Jews did. A person must positively turn to something better – that is, God and His ways.

Verses 13-20

1.

And he said unto them, Know ye not this parable? and how then will ye know all parables?

2.

The sower soweth the word.

3.

And these are they by the way side, where the word is sown; but when they have heard, Satan cometh immediately, and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts.

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4.

And these are they likewise which are sown on stony ground; who, when they have heard the word, immediately receive it with gladness;

5.

And have no root in themselves, and so endure but for a time: afterward, when affliction or persecution ariseth for the word's sake, immediately they are offended.

6.

And these are they which are sown among thorns; such as hear the word,

7.

And the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful.

8.

And these are they which are sown on good ground; such as hear the word, and receive it, and bring forth fruit, some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some an hundred.

To those in the circle who did not understand the parable, Jesus then began to explain the meaning. He began by stating a fact: that if they could not understand *this* most basic of teachings, how could they possibly understand all the others, which require an understanding of *this* one before they can understand deeper things to come?

Jesus told them that the sower is the preacher who preaches the word of God, the Gospel. By the 'word' is meant anything said by God to men. The seed that fell by the wayside, refers to those who hear the Gospel but Satan robs them of it by deceiving them. That is, the Gospel does not take root. So
me people, though, gladly hear the Gospel and appear to take it to heart. But, it is all a sham, for the initial excitement soon leaves them and so they walk away from truth and salvation. They

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are not saved, but only appear to be so. Therefore, they are not elect in the first place. No man who is elect can ever lose his salvation.

This latter kind are most often found amongst the more 'excitable' groups such as Pentecostals or charismatics, or those who use modern methods to attract hearers. Those apparently 'saved' will keep attending churches with many people of their own age, because it is an alternative social scene. But, their salvation is not real – it is only maintained by their social gathering. This is why I often challenge charismatics who claim to be believers to 'stand alone' and I would prove to them whether or not they were saved! It is possible because any man who is not genuine, cannot exist without many around him... they prop-up what is false and only emotional.

This kind of fake believer will fall apart when first hit by troubles or when persecuted by the world. He has no substance or real Holy Spirit life, so cannot grasp hold of vital help within. He just fails and then leaves the local church. He does so because he was never saved in the first place.

Others *appear* to be saved, but are slowly choked by this world's attractions and woes, money, jobs, possessions, status, deception, etc. We are told that we "shall know them by their fruit". In other words, if someone is truly saved we will see him bearing spiritual fruit. If there are no fruit, he is not genuine. And, in scripture, any plant or tree that does not bear fruit is considered to be useless, and is cut down and burned. This was the type that joined the 'Toronto Blessing' in droves – they were fake to begin with.

However, by contrast, those who are predestinated and elect will be truly saved. They are sown in "good ground". These people are overjoyed to be saved and instantly start to grow spiritual fruit. Fruit always begins as a small growth, but then gather in weight and usefulness with time. The results of such a salvation are obvious, and the fruit can be abundant; in some, very abundant.

And so Jesus explained the parable of the sower. Arminians, cannot really grasp this truth. They think *anyone* can be saved so long as the preacher puts it to him in the right way. If he does not, then another preacher might come along with a different approach, and so catch the imagination. But, this is not how people are saved. Firstly, they are *ordained* to be saved – predestinated – in eternity. They are then 'elect': their place in Heaven is assured because they are chosen. Then, some time after they are born, they are regenerated, which

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means their spirits are made alive. Not long after that, they hear the Gospel and are 'converted' or saved on this earth. This is the seed that found itself in good ground.

Verses 21-23

1.

And he said unto them, Is a candle brought to be put under a bushel, or under a bed? and not to be set on a candlestick?

2.

For there is nothing hid, which shall not be manifested; neither was any thing kept secret, but that it should come abroad.

3.

If any man have ears to hear, let him hear.

Then Jesus asked them a question: "Is a candle brought to be put under a bushel, or under a [bushel? and](#) not to be set on a candlestick?" A 'bushel' was a kind of bucket that measured an exact 9 litres. What Jesus is saying is this: 'When you bring in a candle, it is to light the room – you don't put it under a bucket!'

Yet, this is what most Christians do in life; they claim salvation but then proceed to hide the fact, for fear of man. They never proclaim their spiritual state, never oppose false religions; never speak out against blasphemy; and never stand up to be counted.

Jesus said that whatever people try to hide will one day come to light. Those things people wish to hide will be made public. Christians should not try to hide their faith, and, anyway, at the end of time God will publicly give details of our lives in front of everyone on judgment day. Jesus again says "If any man have ears to hear, let him hear." Thus, what He said was only understood by the elect in the group before Him.

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Verses 24& 25

1.

And he said unto them, Take heed what ye hear: with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you: and unto you that hear shall more be given.

2.

For he that hath, to him shall be given: and he that hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he hath.

Verse 24 appears to be linked to the parable of the sower. It is certainly spoken immediately after the parable, as the word 'and' indicates. 'And', kai, is a conjunction, a copulative that connects one word or phrase to another.

As a connective, it is used by Jesus to bring in another concept, that of God's grace being given in measure. God gives a different measure of faith, for example, to each of us. Almost like fingerprints, unique to every individual, so God gives us what we need or what He wishes us to have, on an individual basis. There is no such thing, then, as an 'average' Christian. Each is different, and each has gifts and benefits unique to our person, as decided by God.

With this in mind, Jesus told His small audience to listen carefully and take note – whatever standard you judge others by (metreō and repeated in the root, metron), is the same standard you will yourself be judged by. Note that the words 'measure ye mete' are virtually the same word; 'mete' is the root of 'measure').

Today, we say something like 'Do unto others what you would like them to do unto you'. Jesus' words are very similar. He is warning them to be careful how they treat others, because any bad judgment could easily be used against them. He then told them that those who hear will receive more. 'To hear' is a figure for being spiritually alive, saved. Those who are saved and seek God's face will receive a great deal. The more they seek God the more He will give them. Those who do not seek God get nothing.

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This means Christians must listen carefully to those who are called to teach them. Only those who listen can understand, and those who understand show evidence of an ability to act out spiritual truths. And when they actively seek God in this way, they will be “given more”. This means they will be added to those who belong to God, the company of saints, the saved. For reasons that do not make sense, many Christians are shy to tell others that Christians are unique and select. They are NOT like the unsaved, but move amongst the brethren, whose Father is God. As such, Christians are superior to anyone else; not in their own strength or importance, but in that of Christ. Of course, unbelievers hate this kind of talk and become rancid in their own hatred. Let them carry on, for their fate is already sealed.

“For he that hath, to him shall be given”. ‘For’, gar, is another conjunction, so this statement is also linked to the previous one. It is used to conclude a former saying or to confirm it. In this text it does both. “He that hath” is a reference to the man who has salvation, the gift of God. Such a man is given many blessings and benefits, simply because he belongs to God, in Christ. This is important, because it means that an unsaved person cannot and will not be given the special blessings or benefits kept solely for the children of God. It is also why their lives tend to be miserable.

God says He will remove whatever the unsaved person has. In particular he refers to the previous parable, where a man loosely holds to the Gospel before rejecting it. It also means that God is under no obligation to give the unsaved anything at all, though He does allow them to enjoy broad things of life, such as breathing, sun, rain, food, etc. What God gives to the saved is far more, and far superior.

Verses 26-29

1.

And he said, So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground;

2.

And should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how.

3.

For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear.

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4.

But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come.

Jesus continues with another conjunction – ‘and’, kai, showing us that these texts are one long saying or teaching. Indeed, verse 26 proves it.

The “kingdom of God” is like the previous statements, said Jesus: “So is the kingdom...”. That is, the kingdom is similar to the account I gave earlier. The sentence again reinforces the predestination message of God, for Jesus says that a man who casts seed onto the ground can wake or go to sleep, but he will not understand how the seed grows. This is because “the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself.” This takes us right back to Genesis One, where we are told God made everything to bear its own offspring, which will always be like the parent. Yes, scientists know the process today, but people did not know how things worked in Jesus’ time.

Even today, though scientists understand the process of seed growth, they can only describe what has already been done. God created the seed; scientists can only talk about what happens to it – they do not really know how seeds ‘work’ in the most basic of senses, because they cannot describe creation; they can only describe the process!

Jesus said that though the man does not understand how seeds grow, he does know that when the corn heads are fully ripe, he must take his sickle and harvest the corn. We can thus say that though we cannot understand God’s predestination of the elect, we do know when salvation takes place. The growth of a soul is in the hands of Almighty God; all man can do is preach and wait to see a response. Do not think that any Arminianism will save a man, no matter how clever the words or how compassionate the preacher. God saves, because He has promised salvation to those whom He predestinated in eternity. Man can do absolutely zero to effect a man’s rebirth.

Verses 30-34

1.

And he said, Whereunto shall we liken the kingdom of God? or with what comparison shall we

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compare it?

2.

It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when it is sown in the earth, is less than all the seeds that be in the earth:

3.

But when it is sown, it groweth up, and becometh greater than all herbs, and shooteth out great branches; so that the fowls of the air may lodge under the shadow of it.

4.

And with many such parables spake he the word unto them, as they were able to hear it.

5.

But without a parable spake he not unto them: and when they were alone, he expounded all things to his disciples.

Jesus then said, 'What shall we liken the kingdom of God to?' He is doing what every good teacher does – repeats major items in different ways. Thus, those who are unsaved can have no excuse, and neither can those who are saved!

Jesus was not particularly talking about Heaven. Heaven is only a part of His statement. The 'kingdom' refers to everything about salvation, from predestination in eternity, to regeneration, to salvation on this earth, to entering Heaven... it is the whole thing. So, what is this whole thing like? It is like a mustard seed. It is the smallest seed belonging to any plant. But, when it grows, it becomes the greatest of all herbs with huge branches, so big that even birds can rest on them and be shaded from the sun.

This is a very clear indication, that though the Gospel begins 'small', its effect is enormous. Also, many are called but only a few are chosen, again reinforcing predestination. What seems

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like nothing to the unsaved, is the key to eternity for the saved. It is true that the unsaved constitute the most people, but their end is hell, where they have no rest. Only a remnant are saved from the mass of humanity, yet, together, they constitute a large army of believers, whose salvation gives rest and spiritual health.

Jesus continued to give many more similar parables to his general hearers, and did not speak to them without parables. Some understood, but most did not. He waited until the small crowd had gone home, before explaining the meanings of the parables to His new disciples, including the Apostles.

You see, we are not always to explain everything to everybody! The Holy Spirit often moves us on from some people, so that they do not hear anything other than the Gospel. We are not beholden to explain to everyone! The Holy Spirit alone decides who we will stay longer with... and that number is usually very small. This is a lesson I found hard to learn. Most preachers and teachers are so concerned with 'coming across' that they ignore this basic rule: we may only spend time with those the Holy Spirit points out to us; the rest may hear the Gospel only. In this way God directs us specifically to those who need either further teaching or even denunciation. Some hear gladly, and others find what we say a stumblingblock. The difference is not up to us, but God.

Verses 35-41

1.

And the same day, when the even was come, he saith unto them, Let us pass over unto the other side.

2.

And when they had sent away the multitude, they took him even as he was in the ship. And there were also with him other little ships.

3.

And there arose a great storm of wind, and the waves beat into the ship, so that it was now full.

4.

And he was in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow: and they awake him, and say unto

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him, Master, carest thou not that we perish?

5.

And he arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.

6.

And he said unto them, Why are ye so fearful? how is it that ye have no faith?

7.

And they feared exceedingly, and said one to another, What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?

That same day, in the evening, Jesus told the disciples he wanted to sail to the other side of lake Galilee. Thus, Jesus dismissed the crowds and He and the disciples sailed towards the other shore. As they sailed, Jesus slept at the back of the ship, His head laying on a pillow. As He slept a great storm arose – quite usual on lake Galilee.

The storm raised huge waves that crashed against the ship, and the ship started to fill with water. The disciples were so frightened they woke Jesus up, shouting above the roar of the wind, 'Master, don't you care that we might perish?'

Is this not how most react when hit by storms of life and trouble? It happens when we claim faith but do not keep it inside our hearts. Every Christian claims to trust the Lord, but their reactions negate what they claim. Christ in the ship is very like having the Holy Spirit within. Do you really think the Spirit would let us sink into oblivion? Nor would Jesus have allowed the storm to destroy the boat and His disciples! The answer is simple: trust God and do not let the problems you see overwhelm you! Human problems are as nothing to God; they are like flies to be swatted away!

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Jesus immediately awoke, stood up, and rebuked the wind. That is, He spoke to the wind sharply. Of course, wind is not a breathing being, so what does this mean? You will remember that Jesus raised Lazarus loudly. This was not for the sake of Lazarus, or for Himself. Jesus need not have said a word, or even raised an eyebrow! His power was sufficient. Jesus used words and rebuke to show a clear link between His power and the effect on the wind. It was the only way the disciples could see the might of God. The wind and sea immediately calmed down and the sea was as smooth as glass.

With God as our Lord, there is always spiritual calm. The trouble is, few of us realize it and reflect it in our behaviour and thinking! God is with us always. That is why Jesus then turned to the disciples and asked a simple question: "Why are ye so fearful? How is it that ye have no faith?" His query was as blunt as it can get!

The disciples had been with Him a few months; they had heard his magnificent words and witnessed His many miracles. Yet, they did not have enough faith in Him to rest easy during the storm. A storm could not drown God! Jesus understood perfectly that as human beings they wanted to have faith, but that their humanity caused them to fear. They only saw the problem, not the answer. Like most of us! In saying what He said Jesus was not condemning the disciples; He was giving them a truth they would remember for life. He is always with us, in whatever life storm we encounter.

The disciples were terrified, for they had never seen such power. They asked themselves: 'What kind of man is this, that even the wind and sea obey him?' it seems remarkable to us that they did not recognize Who He was! This is not unlike us today: do we really recognize God? Do we recognize when He acts in our lives? Do we acknowledge His power and might? Do we trust Him implicitly no matter what happens to us? The answers we give are vital to our spiritual well-being.

(Note: For a modern explanation of miracles, see the book, '[Plagues, a Crossing, and Small White Things](#)'. K B Napier, Publ. Petra Press, Lulu).

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