

A Secret Place Called Christmas

by Carter Conlon

Carter Conlon's sermon reveals the profound strength and hope found in the humble circumstances of Christmas, encouraging believers to seek God's presence in unexpected places.

Duration: 40:24

Scripture: Exodus 12:3-14, Psalm 91:1-10, Luke 2:14

Topics: "Christmas"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of moving towards the place where God's strength, power, provision, and pathway can be found. Ordinary and honest people are encouraged to follow this direction, even if there may not be any obvious personal advantage. As they begin to move, a song breaks out in their hearts, and the sky is filled with angels praising God. This heavenly choir and song can only be heard if God reveals it, and it brings peace and moves believers towards sharing God's kindness, especially with the poor. The speaker also highlights that God can speak to anyone, regardless of their social status or education, as long as they have a heart that is open to hearing from Him.

Transcript

I want to speak to you this morning about a secret place called Christmas. A secret place called Christmas, Psalm 91 and Luke chapter 2. Now, Father, I thank you, Lord, with all my heart. I thank you, Jesus, for this day.

Thank you for the knowledge that every day is Christmas to the believer in Christ. Lord, there's a source of life and joy that's available to all of us, a stability, the ability to see and have hope and vision, to fight. Lord, there's strength that comes to those who belong to you.

I ask you, Lord, for an infusion of that strength into my own life this morning. I ask you, God, to speak to everybody who's gathered here to hear your word today. Lord, you've got to open our hearts.

You've got to give us the power to be able to hear. You want to protect us. Lord, help us to understand this.

Give us the strength to hear it in Jesus' mighty name. Psalm 91, beginning at verse 1, Psalm of Moses. He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.

I will say of the Lord, he is my refuge and my fortress. My God in him will I trust. Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, that means from every trap that might be laid for your feet, and from the noisome pestilence, that means from everything that comes your way to tell you it's going to bring you into a trap.

He shall cover thee with his feathers and under his wings shalt thou trust. His truth shall be thy shield and thy buckler. In other words, the truth of God lodged in the heart and in the mind of those who know God will be all the strength that you need to get through the days ahead of you.

Thou shall not be afraid for the terror by night, nor for the arrow that flyeth by day, that means any evil report, be it day or night, nor for the pestilence that walks in darkness, or for the destruction that wastes at noonday. A thousand shall fall at thy side and ten thousand at thy right hand, but it shall not come nigh thee. Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold and see the reward of the wicked, because thou hast made the Lord, which is my refuge, even the most high thy habitation, or your dwelling place.

You've chosen, in other words, to live where God is. There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling. Thank God for the Word of God and for the promises of God.

Luke chapter 2 is the Christmas story in the New Testament. And the background of that story, there was a fierce debate going on among the people about taxation. Sounds a whole lot like our day.

I don't know about you, but sounds like the day we're living in today. Caesar Augustus got it in his heart, the brilliant idea that the whole world should be taxed and everybody had to go home to their hometown to be registered so that the last dime could be exacted from the people. And no doubt there was a fierce debate going on about this among the people.

Now, the people were powerless to do anything, but nevertheless, there'd be a significant amount of discussion about it. People were being relocated from their jobs and their homes. Irrespective of the season that they were in, there seemed to be circumstances outside of their control and they had to change towns, change locations.

Some people may have lost their jobs even over this having to be relocated. It must have seemed to many as if they had lost complete control over their own future. And I know there are people here today that's exactly the way you feel.

The American dream has become somewhat of a nightmare for some people. And you had expectations, but those expectations are very quickly fading. You don't know what the future is going to hold.

What you thought was secure is no longer secure. The job you thought was going to be leading you up and up and up is suddenly plateauing and in danger of actually disappearing before your very eyes. It's amazing.

They were at the whim of an occupying power which must have made every person's hope for the future just an absolute fading reality. The Roman Empire, of course, had conquered the Holy Land and the people of God were not in control of their own destiny. They're not in control of their own government.

They're not in control of their own future. And it must have seemed that hope was fading. And that's more or less the temperature of our generation for a lot of people.

Now, if that's not you today, thank God for that. But for many people in our time, hope is fading. The hope of a future, the hope of something for your children maybe that was better than what you had.

And it's sliding through people's fingers actually quite quickly. We can only imagine the religious, social, and political posturing that was going on as every man plotted for his own place of influence, security, and comfort. There'd be so much jockeying going on behind the scenes as people are having to relocate.

And everybody is looking for a port as it is of safety, whether it's financial, political, whatever the situation is, they're looking for a place. Now, in the midst of all of this, a great secret of God was about to be revealed. But who would know it then? And who would know it now? The secret of God has never changed.

It's only a secret because in our natural thinking, we would never think of looking to the place where the strength of God really is. There are some people today have come into this house and you're looking for strength, but you already have a preconception in your mind of where strength is. But what if God is about to speak something to you about a place of strength and promise that you have not yet considered? Isaiah said it this way, to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed? In other words, Isaiah said, God, I see what you're going to do.

I see how you're going to do it. I see that it's, it's the strength of your arm. It's where power is found.

It's where stability is. It's where we're given the promises and the ability to, to win this battle and to get to the finish line with our hands raised, thanking God for a life of faithfulness and provision. Just like elder Jerry said today, that's no coincidence folks.

The day he gave his life to Jesus Christ was the day he started believing God for God to do something phenomenal in his family and in his home. And the day he gave his life to Christ was the day a son-in-law who was on the mission field with his daughter was born. You call it coincidence if you want, but I've been around too long and I've seen too many coincidences now in the kingdom of God.

To whom is the arm of the Lord revealed? In verse two, Isaiah says, he will grow up before him as a tender plant and as a root out of dry ground. He has no form or comeliness. And when we see him, there's no beauty that we should desire him.

Isaiah saw the Christ. He saw the power of God coming into the world. And Isaiah said, who's going to believe this? He starts up by saying in the beginning, who's believed our report? I mean, God, who's going to believe this? You're going to come into the world so stealthily as it is that to the natural mind, there will be no obvious advantage to being associated with you.

Why would anybody want to be associated with you the way you're going to choose to come into the world? Who could he speak to? Isaiah said, who to whom would the arm of the Lord be revealed? Now, the answer to that is simple. You find it in the Christmas story in Luke chapter two, beginning at verse eight. And here's the answer.

He could speak to an ordinary, honest people who were simply open to what he had to say to them. That's all God requires of you and requires of me. And if I'm honest and open, he can speak to me.

If I'm willing to let my value system be challenged, or the way that my eyes are looking for security, if I'm willing to hear something that I may not have considered, then God says he will reveal the strength of

Christ to me. I will know where there's hope and direction and a future. And there were in the same country, verse eight of Luke chapter two, shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.

And lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them and the glory of the Lord shone round about them. And they were sore afraid. And the angel said to them, fear not, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a savior, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you. You shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

And suddenly there was with the angel, a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying glory to God in the highest and on earth, peace, goodwill, or the goodness of God as it is towards men on earth, peace in the heart and God's goodwill towards men. This idea was preposterous to the non-spiritual mind. I want you to think about it for a moment that God's plan, provision, protection and purpose for us would be found in a place where most would least expect it to be in a place of poverty.

The strength of God, the angel said, has come into the world. The strength of God that brings peace. The strength of God that gives strength.

The strength of God that gives a sound mind. The strength of God that creates a benevolence as it is in the heart towards other people is found in poverty. I mean, so foreign to the natural mind, an absolutely preposterous idea.

I wonder how many people had God tried to awaken to this great and secret place, but they just pushed it away as a random thought that was not worth exploring. I wonder how many people in the inn in Bethlehem had a pang of conscience as they sat at the table, fellowshiping, feasting, reading their Bibles, plotting their strategies to escape taxation or to get out from under the hand of what they felt was oppression or to better their lives or to secure their own future. And suddenly a thought comes into their heart.

The thought being, I wonder how that young couple is doing that we sent to the barn to have their baby. I wonder how many people had the thought, but felt it wasn't worth exploring it. Now, can you imagine if they had explored it? And so they sat in the inn and they had their political discussions and they read their scriptures perhaps, and they ate their meals and they completely lived outside of the strength of God.

You see, God couldn't speak to them because they had a view of where success and security lies. And it was just outside the door of where they were. Think about for a moment, Jesus coming to the last church in the book of Revelation.

He said, you have secured a place for yourself and you feel you have enough to ride out the storm, but you don't know that what you have procured to yourself is not where strength is found. It's, it's, it's, it's, there's no vision there. There's no glory there.

There's no strength there. There's no peace there. I can imagine if, if I had been sitting in the table in the inn and God had moved on my heart and I at least thought about getting up and going there, I would have gone in and just think of the thoughts you and I would have heard in that generation as ordinary shepherds, more or less outside of the whole sphere of influence of that day come in and they've, they've got this incredible revelation that God's given them of strength and provision and protection.

David said it this way, I will greatly praise the Lord with my mouth. I will praise him among the multitude. That's Psalm 109 verses 30 and 31.

In verse 31, it says he shall stand at the right hand of the poor to save him from those that condemn his soul. I will praise him. David had this revelation in his heart.

I know where God is. He stands at the right hand of the fatherless and the poor and those that have no helper and the despairing and the addicted and the lonely and those whom association with brings no natural advantage that we can see. We don't, we don't see how is this going to bring any advantage to me? Shouldn't I be, isn't success on the up and up? And we have a view of what the up and up is, but ironically in the kingdom of God, the up and up is the down and down.

Everything is inverted. Strength and success is not you and I jockeying for some new piece of the pie that's going to keep us happy, but it's moving to those who have no pie and sharing the little bit that we have with them. Now, the only thing that made these shepherds different from anyone else was their willingness to journey in the direction of that which the messenger had spoken to them.

Verse 15 says, it came to pass as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, let us go down into Bethlehem and see this thing, which has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us. Let us go and see. Let us, let us journey towards this place of poverty and see if what we have heard is true.

You know, if I could plant that thought in the hearts of those that are gathered here today, and we're talking about our own security for the future. We're talking about security in a season of economic upheaval that might be deeper than any of us have ever even thought we were going to experience. And the question in our hearts is where, where are we going to find strength? I want to suggest to you that God's word has always told us move towards the poor, go to the lowest places, walk among those that don't have a helper, go to the orphan and the widow, don't eat your morsel alone as it is, have a heart of compassion.

In verse 13 and 14, it says this, this journey began with an open heaven. It was a song that cannot be heard unless God reveals it. It's a song that brings peace into our hearts and it moves us towards sharing the kindness of God with all people, especially the poor.

And the scripture says, and suddenly there was with the angel, a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying glory to God in the highest and on earth, peace and goodwill towards all people. And then suddenly as they begin to move to this place of no obvious personal advantage, believing that they've been told that this is where the strength and the power and the provision and the pathway of God is found. Ordinary, honest people, hopefully like you and I, who just simply move in that direction.

And as they begin to move, a song breaks out in their heart. And I want you to picture it for a moment. The sky is filled with angels.

Now, I don't know how many of them had wings and how many didn't. I do know in the Bible that some of the creatures of heaven have wings. Some of them have six wings, actually.

The sky is suddenly filled. I don't think he, I don't think the Lord just, just sent half a dozen. I think there was, I think it filled the sky.

I think it was a choir, a chorus and it, it, it was there, but it was only open to the people who were making the journey. I mean, everybody who's sitting in the inn is missing this, this heavenly choir, this song, this song that you can't hear with the natural ear. It has to be revealed from God himself, glory to God in the highest and on earth, peace and goodwill towards men.

It's a song that bursts into your heart. It's a song of God's kindness. It's a song that starts to move us into a different kind of a lifestyle.

It's a song that enables God to begin to lead us and to do as he asks us to do. And it's always going to show itself in kindness to other people. From the day I came to Christ, I can't even, you know, we used to sing songs in university that were just, the words were just so stupid yet they seemed so profound at the time.

There was one particular singer, I remember he wrote most of his stuff in a mental institution and we used to sing it in college like it was, wow, this is just awesome. And the guy himself is mentally ill. But another song came into my heart.

The moment you are moving towards God with honesty. It's a song that has taken me to Africa. It's taken me to maximum security prisons.

It took me to a prison, a Hindu Muslim prison in South America. It's taken me into the Arctic. It's taken me out with the native Canadian people on the reservations.

It's taken me into so many, it's a song that God puts in the heart. It's a song of God's glory. It's a song of his own goodwill.

It's a song that is not audible to the natural ear. It's a song he put in my heart that it didn't matter where we were. I remember when we spent a season in a little country Baptist church one time.

I have to tell you, the preacher was so old that if he raised his hand to make a point, he had to grab the pulpit with his other hand, literally. You remember that he would have fallen over if he would have just literally fallen over. He was so old.

I used to hope he wouldn't die on the pulpit when he was speaking. I remember one time we came out. I'm going to tell a story on you Pastor Teresa.

I hope you don't mind. This is Christmas. You have to be nice.

I remember one time we came out and we're sitting in the car and she said to me, how can you worship God in that place? Because it really wasn't very musical. There was a song inside of me. It wasn't about where I was.

It's a song that has nothing to do with the choir. Thank God for good choirs. It has nothing to do with the orchestra.

It's something that God puts inside of your heart. How else can I explain it? It's not anything to do. You see a lot of people come into church and if the choir hits a wrong note or it's kind of a flat day in the house of God, then they walk out and say, oh, what a waste of time.

Not realizing you're relegated in a sense to what your ears can hear. But I'm telling you, there's another song. It has nothing to do with what's going on here.

It's a song that causes you to be able to raise your hands and lift your voice and give God glory. It's a song that makes people wonder. David said, I was taken out of a place where I was sinking.

I was put upon a solid rock and God put a new song within me. That's a song that people can see. It's not a song that's hard with the ear.

They can see it, David said, and many will fear and begin to turn towards God when they see this song. It's a song of hope in the midst of a storm. It's a song that enables us to give when everyone else is hoarding.

It's a song of direction when everyone else is confused. It's a song of love in a time of hate. It's a song of unity when the world is dividing.

It's a song that cannot be heard apart from God. Hallelujah. He shall cover thee with his feathers.

Psalms 91 verse four. And that's exactly what happened to the shepherds when they heard this message of the compassion of God to all men and his willingness to forgive and his willingness to have a people and his willingness to flow through a people and show his kindness to a fallen world. When they began to move towards where God was speaking, the sky opened.

He shall cover thee with his feathers, it says in Psalm 91 verse four. There's a covering. There's a song that heaven reveals, a song that only angels know and fully understand, but God, by his mercy, begins to reveal it to our hearts.

He says in verse seven, verse five, he says, You'll not be afraid for the terror by night, nor the arrow that flies by day. You'll not be afraid when darkness comes and it seems that evil is starting to lurk everywhere, nor for anything that happens in the daytime, it will not take away your confidence, nor for that which is devouring, verse six, in darkness, nor for that which is destroying at high noon. You'll not be afraid.

Your confidence will not be taken away from you. A thousand will fall at your side and 10,000 at your right hand. Jesus spoke about the last days.

He said, There's a season coming when men's hearts are going to fail them for fear of the things that are happening. That's the falling. A thousand falling away on this side and 10,000 on that side.

But the man who has moved towards what God is speaking will stand. The woman will stand. There will be a confidence in your heart.

You'll not be taken down by an evil report. Only with your eyes, you'll see, behold and see the reward of the wicked. You'll not be a partaker of the fear.

You'll not be a partaker of the spiritual poverty. You'll not be a partaker of any of the destruction. You'll see the reward as it is of those who have not chosen to walk in God's truth.

Because you've made the Lord, which is my refuge, even the most high, your habitation, there'll no evil befall you and neither shall any plague come near your house. I believe this with everything that's in my heart. I happen to believe that you and I are going out of this generation, the way the children of Israel

came out of Egypt.

They were instructed by God to gather in their houses. They were told to eat of the lamb, to partake as it is of the provision of God through his son, Jesus Christ. They were told to eat the bitter with the sweet, that which made them feel good and that which challenged them to the core.

It was not to be a selective diet or just looking through the scriptures for all of the wonderful promises, but there are some challenges and callings that were not to avoid in the word of God. They were to bring in their neighbors whose house might be too small for a lamb. There was to be a compassion among them.

And they were to get the blood of the lamb upon the doorposts of their house and trust God because God says, when that angel of death passes over, when I see the blood, it's not coming near your house. I'm going to protect your house. Praise God.

You and I can stand on that today. If you know Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, I'm not necessarily saying that life is going to be easy, but I'm telling you everything that's going to destroy this world and destroy those who don't know God is not going to come near your house. That's the secret.

The whole of Egypt was trying to figure out a way to smother the testimony of God and to corral the people of God and to destroy the testimony of God, which is what the world has always been about, about destroying God and his testimony through his son, Jesus Christ. But there was a people that God was able to speak to and they were able to move in compassion and obedience and they went into their house and there was a secret in the midst of that darkness when that angel of death passed over that whole nation. And there wasn't a house that says without one dead in it.

I'm telling you, there was another people in the midst of it all who were at the table. The candle was lit. Their shoes were on their feet.

Their loins were girded with truth. The lamb of God was on their table. Their neighbors were surrounded them.

They had a word of hope and encouragement for their children. Praise be to God. When there were screams throughout the nation because of the difficulties that had come, fathers and mothers were in that house.

And once and for all, the hearts of the fathers had turned to the children and the children to their fathers. And the fathers were telling their children, you have no need to fear. We have a word from God.

We have brought our neighbors in. We are sharing what we have from those that have too little. And we have the blood of the lamb on our doorpost.

And tomorrow we're up and we're out of here. Hallelujah. It will not come nigh your house.

It seems like an odd Christmas message, but it's been burning in me all week. And the scripture says the shepherds returned glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen as it was told unto them. The shepherds returned, the honest people.

They saw it. It became a reality to them. They didn't fully understand it, but they saw it.

And they somehow knew that the ways of God are not the ways of man, that his thoughts are higher than our thoughts and his ways are higher than our ways. But they received it and they accepted it. And they returned as you and I can return home today, glorifying and praising God for the things that we've heard and we've seen as it was told to us.

You can go home today and say, Lord, my job may not be secure, but my future is secure. My neighborhood may not be secure, but my family is secure. Glory to God.

I have found the way up is the way down. Or might I say the way down is the way up. To go to those that have no helper, to be kind, to let the benevolence of God be expressed through my life.

God promises, this is where my strength will be. Who will see this, Isaiah said, who will understand this? Shepherds, just ordinary people. They probably saw themselves outside of the loop, outside of all the movers and shakers.

They're out on a mountainside where it was cold and they were doing the little bit that they knew to do. But they were just people who God could speak to. You see, that's the difference.

God could speak to them. It doesn't matter whether you have a job or don't, whether you have a college education or little education. It really doesn't matter.

The issue is, can God speak to you? Can he speak to your heart? Can he lead you to where strength is? Can he lead me to where strength is found? Then we can go home and praise God and glorify God. And at our supper table or dinner table or restaurant table or food bank table, wherever it is we're going, we can be at that table and we can give God glory, whether it's our family, our children, our friends, whoever it is, we can glorify God because we have believed what we have heard. We have believed that God is faithful and our voices are not raised among those who want vengeance and justice as they see it.

And they're slicing the pie and the grumblers and the complainers and the plotters and the schemers and the planners. We're not found among them. We're found at a table where God is.

We're found at a table of strength where true strength is found. We're found being able to open our voices and give calm assurance to our families. And fathers, that's what you're going to have to do in the days ahead.

Mothers, you're going to have to have that voice of calm assurance, and it can only come from God. Move towards the poor. If I feel, if I was a general and you were an army, I'd be giving you an instruction today.

If you want to win this battle, move towards the poor. Move towards kindness. Now you need wisdom, but God will give you wisdom.

You're not to open your, you're not to open your pocket in every situation. God will give you wisdom. The Holy Spirit will lead you and tell you what to do and how to do it and who to do it for.

But I'm telling you in the midst of all upheaval and chaos, as in their day, this is where joy is found. This is where the purpose of life is. This is where the strength of God is.

This is where the never ending supply of Christ's life is found. It's simply getting up and moving towards other people. Praise be to God.

Hallelujah. And so I guess in that sense, we can say that Christmas is a secret place. There are a lot of people celebrating Christmas today in the tens, if not hundreds of millions today, but there are very few that understand really what it's all about.

It's a secret place where God became a man, came to this earth, lived among us and went to a cross and paid the price because we had, we were too poor to pay any price to ever get out of the mess we'd gotten ourselves into. He paid the price. He moved towards our need.

And he said to his own disciples, as the father has sent me, now I send you. The examples of this Christ who went to a cross and gave us hope and gave us life. If today you don't know Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, I want you to know this one thing.

God loves you. God passionately loves you. He didn't die because he felt obliged to, because you had somehow made a mess of your life.

He died for you because he loves you. He said in the book of Isaiah, a mother could forget her nursing child, but I can't forget you because I engraved you on the palms of my hands. On the head of those nails that went through his hands, your name was on there.

And he did it for you because he loves you. God so loved the world. And you can put your name in there.

God so loved you that he gave his only begotten son. God so loved you that he came to the earth, was covered in this frailty that we call humanity, walked through and lived a sinless life and then went to a cross and paid the price by the giving of himself to the last drop. The scripture says of water and blood that was in his body.

There's nothing more he could do. There's nothing more he could give. There's no further way he could have shown the depth of his love, but to go to a cross.

Offering us everything we need to get us into eternity, offering us the forgiveness that quite often we can't give ourselves. And then calling us into a life that is so supernatural, so sovereign, so other than what we are without God, that all we could do is go home and praise God that he has given us the ability to hear these things. Father, I thank you, Lord, for this day.

I thank you for this church. I thank you, God, for the people that are visiting here today. Give us the grace to admit that we need a savior.

Help us, Lord Jesus Christ, to live for you all the days of our lives. Lord, you're preparing us now. You're making us ready for what we're going to need very shortly.

I thank you for this, Lord. I thank you, God, that our ears are not closed to the secret of Christmas. We have heard it and we do hear it.

I ask you, Lord Jesus Christ, to bless this body of believers. Bless our homes today. God, may there be joy in our houses and singing and kind words and encouragement.

I pray for those who are bitter and can't forgive and it poisons everything in their house. Lord, you forgave us. That's what you did, Lord, when you went to a cross.

Give us the grace to forgive each other now. Take bitterness out of our mouths. Help us, God, to be kind.

Let this be a year in this church that is marked by an unprecedented kindness among your people. We don't need a program to do this, for you yourself told us that we're not to blast a trumpet when we do good, but to do it in secret, and you said you would reward us openly. I believe that.

Thank you for these precious men and women here today. Thank you for our precious children. Thank you for your presence.

My God, don't ever abandon this house, but come and dwell among us in greater measure. Strengthen us, Lord. Father, I thank you for it with all my heart.

In Jesus' name. I'm not going to give an altar call today, but I would like us to stand in a moment. We're going to sing a spiritual song, please, if we could.

I would like you to consider these words today and ask the Lord to let you go home today with joy in your heart, because you've heard something that will give you strength. That's what the shepherds did. There was no altar call in the manger, in the stable.

They just saw it. They heard it, and they went home, and they believed it, and they went home with rejoicing. The scripture says, with rejoicing and joy in their hearts, God, I have seen your salvation.

I don't fully get it, but I believe it, and I'm moving towards it. Keep speaking to me, O God. Keep speaking to my heart, and don't let anything of this world take the joy out of my life.

Let's stand together. Let's let that be our prayer together as we sing. Would you lift up your heads for a moment, please? Father, I pray God for a blessing on this congregation.

Bless our coming in and our going out. Give us spiritual eyes and vision, hearts of compassion, strength that can only be found in you. Thank you, Lord, for your people.

God, I praise you for your people. Lord Jesus Christ, we lift our hands and our hearts to you. We thank you for this great salvation.

We ask you, God Almighty, give us strength in Jesus' name. Hallelujah. Thank you, Lord.

Praise God. We don't meet again today. This is it for Times Square Church.

Would you turn? Just greet somebody today. Say, God bless you. Have a wonderful Christmas Day.

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