

A Beautiful Thing

by Jim Cymbala

The sermon emphasizes the importance of worshipping God sincerely and authentically, without being bound by traditional or external expectations.

Duration: 37:23

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Mark 14:1-25

Topics: "Christian Life"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the importance of true worship and the dangers of turning it into a ritual. He emphasizes that being in the presence of God is essential for conviction of sin. The preacher also highlights the need to focus on Jesus and not get caught up in creating a warm and fuzzy atmosphere during worship. He shares personal experiences of encountering the Lord outside of church settings, emphasizing that Jesus cannot be confined to a box. The sermon encourages individuals to examine their motives and remember that ultimately, Jesus is the one who evaluates their actions.

Transcript

It's very rare in scripture where Jesus was either amazed, taken back, or expressed delight in something. He loved everyone, but a couple times when he saw great faith, he was taken back by it. He even pointed it out to his disciples.

And then in his own hometown, he was amazed at their lack of faith. And there's a couple places in the New Testament where the Lord has something affect him in a deep way. I don't know if there's anyone quite like this that I'm going to read to you.

Because the person who affects Jesus, he says, she's done a good work to me or for me, but literally in the Greek, it says, she's done a good work in me. In other words, he took a delight in what I'm about to describe to you. He took some inner delight.

Should I say encouragement? Can I say it sparked fresh joy in him at a critical time? Whatever it might be, if you tell me and say, oh, God did something great and it really blessed me, I would say, yeah, I get that. That's been the story for 2,000 years. But this is Jesus saying to someone, no, no, she just blessed me.

Whoa, I want to know about that. I also want to know about it because it links us together with a phrase theologically that's very important, which is worship. Everyone say worship.

The catechism of the church in England says basically that we were created or it's part of the apostle's creed that we were created to worship God. We were not created to eat. We were not created, although we need to eat to live.

You're not created to vacation or procreate and have children. You're not created to get dressed and be a fashion plate and GQ and all that. But what we were created for was to worship God and enjoy him forever.

That's what's going to happen in heaven. No one's texting. Oh, how many are happy no one's texting in heaven? Because if we get up there and I see you on your little thing, I will ask Peter to have you removed because... No.

Notice what makes heaven, heaven. Everyone's taken up with Jesus and they're worshipping and that's what the delight is. So this story has lessons for us because it has to do with worship.

Now we live in a day where praise and worship is a major industry. And right while this meeting today, there's probably a thousand praise and worship songs being written today by churches, musicians, whatever, and it can get generic. And in some churches, I noticed as I travel around the world, you can begin to worship the spirit of worship.

You begin to worship an atmosphere, not God. You want to create a warm and fuzzy moment, which has emotional overtones, but it's not people making real heart contact with the Lord. And thus lives are not changed.

Sin is not being convicted of. Why? Because you're not really in the presence of God. You're going through a praise and worship ritual and it can be quiet.

You can light candles or you can lift your hands and go like this. It all can become a ritual if you lose the reality of it. How many say amen? So now this is why we had a lot of lessons in here.

So let's see what we can gather. It's found in the book of Mark, Mark 14. Now the Passover and the festival of unleavened bread were only two days away.

This is toward the end of Christ's life on earth, the last week of his life. And the chief priests and the teachers of the law were scheming to arrest Jesus secretly and kill him. Just stop there and see what he's surrounded by.

A religious feast is coming, the famous Passover, which was concurrent and then followed by the unleavened bread celebration. The chief priests, that's the religious leaders and the teachers of the law were scheming to arrest him and kill him. How do you minister? How do you preach? How do you function when people around you are looking at you to kill you? To kill you, not I want him out of town.

We must kill him. It shows you how twisted religion can make you. Without really knowing God, you can get nasty and be going to church every single Sunday.

So the Bible tells us, but notice their hypocrisy, but not during the festival they said for the people may riot. Not because it's wrong, we just don't want to cause a scene. We're going to kill the dude, but not now because it just won't work.

While he was in Bethany reclining at the table in the home of Simon the leper, I'm so glad Jesus had friends like Simon the leper, right? A woman came with an alabaster jar, a very expensive perfume made of pure nard. And she broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head. In the King James, it says alabaster box.

There's nothing in the Greek that refers to any kind of box. This is like a vial or a jar of precious perfume. And if you break the top, you can pour it all out.

Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, why this waste of perfume? It could have been sold for more than a year's wages. That's how valuable it was. And the money given to the poor and they rebuked her harshly.

So that's very strong in the original language. They just didn't yell at her. They were harsh.

What are you doing? Stop that. Leave her alone, said Jesus. Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing in me or to me.

But the Greek actually has, she's done a beautiful thing in me. The poor, you always have with you and you can help them anytime you want, but you will not always have me. She did what she could.

She did what she could. There's a good lesson for life. Do what you can.

She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial. In other words, it was prophetic because he was going to die soon. Truly I tell you wherever the gospel is preached and Jim symbol is fulfilling this verse today, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her.

In other words, as long as the gospel era exists, when people preach, they're going to regularly remember her, even though her name is not given. We know its name is Mary from the other accounts, but she's always going to be mentioned. Why? Because this thing touched me so much.

Then Judas Iscariot, one of the 12, went to the chief priests to betray Jesus to them. They were delighted to hear this and they promised to give him money. So he watched for an opportunity to hand them over.

Now there's quite a sandwich. In the beginning and at the end, you have nothing but darkness. You have religious leaders planning to kill an innocent man who happens to be the Messiah that they told the people was soon to come.

He was right in front of them and instead of accepting him, they not only rejected him, they planned his demise. At the end of the passage here, verses 11 and 12, we have Judas who for money, for greed, betrayed Jesus Christ. In the middle, you have a woman, not darkness, she's light, not hatred and scheming and cunning and religious facade and then behind the scenes, it's all vicious.

How are we going to kill him? What a horrible way to live, acting good around people in the temple and then planning murder. No, you have her loving, adoring, worshiping. Lastly, you have greed.

Judas, greed, greed. He betrayed the son of man, the son of God for what? For money. How many people have lost out with God because of filthy money? Sold out what God wanted to do in their life because of money.

No wonder Jesus said you can't serve God and mammon or money. That goes for ministers, for people in the church. I've learned a long time ago when push comes to shove, many people pick money over God.

They're all for God unless it costs a sacrifice. No, I'm not sacrificing money. No, no, no, no.

Here's a lady pouring out a year's worth of perfume, a year's salary worth of perfume. It's just the contrast and now we see Jesus and we see her coming. He's sitting at table.

They didn't sit back in those days. The literal Greek there is, of course, they reclined. The Jewish people copied the Greek culture and what the Romans did, they reclined when they ate.

It was kind of like a short sofa and you would sit back and lean back and eat. You didn't sit at a table like we do in a restaurant. As Jesus is reclining and eating this meal at Simon the leper's house, it seems as if his leprosy had been cured.

He'd been healed by Jesus and now Jesus was following up. That was one of his buddies. He was at Simon the leper's house.

Oh, what a low life thing for the religious leaders. They were used to pomp and ceremony and being with the elite and here's Jesus at a former leper's house eating a meal with common people. What a low life.

Now she walks in. I see her coming. She's not looking around.

She doesn't care what anyone thinks. She comes. She breaks the top of it and she pours this over his head and then the commotion and then Jesus says those words of commendation, which are so incredible.

First of all, he rebukes them for rebuking her. He says, leave her alone. Leave her alone.

Why are you mad at her? Of course, who was rebuking her? It says the crowd that was there and probably all due respect that included the disciples. Certainly Judas because he said that money could have been saved. We could have cashed that in.

Why did he want that to happen? Because he was robbing the pot blind. He was stealing and then Jesus closes it out by saying, see this woman, as long as the good news about my death and resurrection, which hasn't happened yet, long as that story is told from time to time, my spokesmen, my spokeswomen, they're going to come and tell the story about this lady. And on this hot Sunday in July, I have the privilege of reminding you about this unnamed lady.

What was it that she did that made her so special to Jesus that he says, I always want her mentioned as long as you're talking about the good news about my life and death and resurrection, I want her mentioned. Hey, remember, just bring her in from time to time and tell the people what she did because this memory will never die. So this has to do now, of course, with pure worship.

You know, in the book of John, Jesus was in a discussion with a woman who said, you know, should you worship on this mountain where the Samaritans worship? They were half breed to the Jews, half breed people worshiping on the mountain, which I was at when I went to Israel. Or should you worship over on the mountain where the temple is? And then Jesus said something, which struck down 2,000, thousands of years of history. He said, oh no, a day is coming and it's already here where it doesn't matter where building you go to, at one mountain you go to, for the father seeks those who will worship him in spirit and

in truth.

Truth there meaning sincerity. That did away with the whole Jewish religion because everything was based basically around the sacrifices and the worship order that was done only at the temple. And in one sentence, Jesus just dismisses it all because a new day has come.

We don't live under the covenant of Moses. We live under the new covenant. So what was it about this lady? I want to learn from her.

How many would love to do something today or this week that would make God's heart happy? Lift your hand. I'm not talking about God making us happy. He does that all the time, but it's only right to think about his feelings, about Jesus's feelings.

Always remember, just like the Bible says, God can be made sad. Don't grieve the Holy Spirit. Always remember, the same person who has emotions that can be made sad, the same person can be made glad.

So what did she do? Well, let's look at it. First of all, the Bible tells us that she transcended tradition about where you worship. She had prophetic insight.

She realized, I don't have to go to the temple. I don't have to wait to the Passover. I don't have to worry about the feast of unleavened bread.

He's here. I'm here. I can worship right now.

Did you know many Christians never get to that place in their life? Their worship for 98% of it is contained to church on Sunday, Tuesday and prayer meeting. Praise God, we're going to have church. Well, how about the other days of the week? How many believe we can have church every day of the week in that sense? Wave your hand at me.

We can have church anytime. But most of us have been conditioned by the traditions we've grown up in and by our sense of religious sensitivity that we sing and we worship and we let it all out and we weep in God's presence only where it's proper in church. She didn't know anything about that.

It's Simon the leper's house. He's having a meal. I don't care.

It's Jesus. I'm going to just love him and worship him and adore him. I wonder how much we've been held back by that stumbling block in our mind.

How many times we could have worshiped and praised God outside the confines of the church, but we now identify Christianity with the church. How are you doing with the Lord? I go to the Brooklyn Tabernacle. I'm a Baptist.

I'm a Methodist. None of these words mean anything to God, that's how we identify now Christianity. Where do you go on Sunday for an hour or so? Of course, this is far into the New Testament.

We see all kinds of wonderful things happening in the New Testament outside of the context of a religious meeting. Peter goes up on the roof in Acts chapter 10 and he's visited and given direction by God and he has a vision. While he's waiting for lunch, they were slow preparing lunch, so he went up to pray and right on the roof, God visited them because you can worship God on the roof.

All through the New Testament, we find Paul and the apostles and the believers worshiping God, receiving from God, celebrating Jesus, loving Jesus, far outside of the confines of the church. But for a lot of us, we don't get there. If we're going to give a hallelujah or praise the Lord, we got to be in church.

We're taught it's not right to just be praising God in the number three train or the A train. Sometimes you need to praise God in the A train. Trust me, I've ridden the A train.

When they're packing you in like sardines, it's very good to say, praise God, hallelujah. Two of the most remarkable incidents in my life of encounters with the Lord that I can't describe, well, now thinking of another one, three, all happened apart from church. One time, dating my wife home from college, sitting at the kitchen table of her house where she lived then in New Jersey with a minister and her mother, just talking about the Lord, the Lord came in the kitchen.

His presence was as real as that pulpit. We began to break down and weep and we worshiped Jesus. I don't know how long we sat there because you can't put Jesus in a box.

You can't keep him in a church building. Another time, around the same time, really hungry for God, never dreaming I'd be in the ministry, playing basketball at the University of Rhode Island. That was my life, playing the NCAA tournament and going through all of that stuff.

Something was happening and God was reaching for me. I was driving up 95 from New York, from St. Carol up back up to Rhode Island. While I was on 95 in the Connecticut turnpike, I just started singing.

Why don't we sing more? God loves it when we sing to him. Sing unto the Lord a new song. It doesn't say if you have a good voice, sing unto the Lord.

It says, sing unto the Lord a new song. Amen. I began to sing.

I was just happy in the Lord. I was driving and suddenly out of nowhere, I felt the presence of God somehow behind me in the back seat. I began to weep and worship God.

My crying became so violent that I had to pull off to a rest area on the highway. God can meet you in a car. Come on, how many believe what I'm talking about? Put your hands together.

God can meet you anywhere. This lady wasn't waiting for, oh, I got to wait until he goes to the synagogue. No, he said, Simon the leper, I'm going to worship him.

Let's start this week to worship God every time he comes to mind. David says, I worship him when I lay in my pillow at night. I water my bed with tears sometimes when I think of his goodness.

To all of us, let's break out of that mold of keeping God in the box of a religious structure. There's no such a verse telling us to do that. Number two, I want you to just notice that that touched God's heart, that that touched Jesus' heart, that she wasn't waiting for anything.

She was just worshiping him. Forget holy days. There are no holy days.

You all know that, right? There's no holy days. There's no Sabbath. There's no Saturday.

There's no Sunday. There's no Christmas. There's no Easter.

There's no Passover. Every day is sacred now that we're Christians. Can we say amen to that? There's no special day, special building.

The other thing is the way she walked in, look, look, look at me. The way she walked in, she didn't care about anybody around her. When you're a true worshiper, when you're in love with Jesus, you only have eyes for him.

She wasn't looking like, what do they think? Or do I look good? That's a real temptation when you preach or you sing, I would imagine, that you're more conscious of the audience than you are of Jesus. This thing is like a drug. I was telling the pastors in Trinidad, this thing is like a drug.

You can just like the applause of the people or try to impress them with your knowledge or your talent, and you don't realize Jesus is watching you all the time. There's an old saying that Hudson Taylor or someone said, preach like a dying man to dying men. Be conscious that he's watching, he's listening.

At the end of the day, at the end of this sermon, you don't give me the review. He gives me the review. I have to end up alone with him, and he's going to tell me how I preach.

Did I do it to show off? Did I do it to really help you? What are my motives? Am I doing this for a buck? All of those things are searched when you report back to Jesus. So she's like, I don't care about the people. I don't care if they're impressed, and I don't care if they criticize.

I'm going to worship Jesus. I'm going to worship Jesus. When you come in here on Sundays, don't be conscious of who's around you.

Try to focus in on Jesus. What does it matter what the person next to you thinks? What does it matter if they go, ooh, why are you doing that? Why are you crying? Why are you lifting your hands? Hey, all due respect, later for them, we're here for Jesus, right? Come on, can we say amen to that? We're here for Jesus. We're going to worship Jesus.

We're going to praise Jesus. And she has that absolutely single focus. And while I'm on that, let me just sidetrack to this.

Notice what happened to her. This will always happen as I come to a close. This will always happen if you're all out for Jesus.

You're going to get criticized. You want to get criticized? Be all out for Jesus. You want to just fit in with everybody? Be lukewarm like they are.

Just be lukewarm. Just go to church on Sunday. Don't mention God and his word too much.

Don't get fanatical and say, I got to pray about that, and you'll fit in. Just start talking about Jesus all the time and loving him and worshipping. And you know what'll happen? It'll happen from other Christians, just like it happened to her.

The crowd were followers of Jesus. It wasn't the Pharisees and Sadducees criticizing her. You know what the Bible says in the original language in this passage? Two things that are so interesting.

When she started to do that, they started to remonstrate to each other. They started to say like, what's up with her? And loud and all nasty and up in someone's grill. What's up with her? What's she doing that?

Wasting that perfume.

What is she doing that for? And then the Bible says they rebuked her indignantly. They didn't say, ma'am, you shouldn't really do that. No, they yelled at her.

They insulted her. You don't even know what you're doing. Wasting a year.

We could have been doing something good with that. See, when you're all out for Jesus, people who are half-hearted will always come up against you. Listen, that's just the way it is.

You read church history, every minister who took it serious and wanted to win souls and didn't want to play church anymore, other ministers would fight them. Why? Because he was rocking their boat. Hey, just relax.

I got enough people paying tithes to secure a living. What are you getting all fanatical about this for? That's always going to happen. When you and I worship with all our heart and you and I praise God with all of our heart and serve God and invest our money in the things of God, you're going to get criticism from your family, other believers, and the world is going to think you're totally bonkers.

But how many are with me today? I don't care. How many are with me? I don't care. I want to serve Jesus.

We want to hear him say, that touched me. What you sang then touched me. I really believe when we were all singing, and if I may say this for the glory of God, when we were all singing with Brandon in the choir, I lift my hands.

I believe that was sweet smelling to God. That's what, when you lay down in bed at night, what gives you peace? Money? Sex? Drugs? What's going to make you satisfied? No. Being pleasing to God, you can lay in bed at night and say, thank you, Jesus.

Thank you, Jesus. Thank you, Jesus. So there's a good lesson there.

He was moved by the fact that she didn't wait for a holy day or to get in church, in the synagogue or the temple courts with him. She worshiped just everyday situation. Oh, I want that more in my life.

The last one I didn't mention, I have mentioned to you in the past that just happened about four and a half years ago, sitting in my living room of the house that I then lived in, which, listen, I kept it. It was so sacred to me. My wife's sitting over there.

I never told her for over three years. It was just between me and him. But you can meet God anytime.

I thank God we can meet him here, but you can meet him anytime. Don't limit him to the church. And secondly, don't care what people are saying.

Just be focused on him. Lastly, it was costly. She dumped a year's salary right over his head with that precious nard.

Spike nard is one of the old translations. That's because the plant it comes from has little leaves that look like spikes. But it's a precious ointment which was only given in quantity to someone like a king.

Maybe like a super, super, super precious perfume, maybe a drop would be part of your life. But this was actually a commodity that could be traded. That's how valuable this perfume, this nard was back in that

day.

She dumped the whole thing. Oh, that set them off. You know, there are a lot of practical people who are very practical and will criticize you when you get exuberant about serving Jesus and giving to Jesus.

But you know what? When you love, you don't count the cost. For God so loved the world that he counted the cost and said, I'll give you some angels, but I'm not giving my son. No, what did he do? Gave us his son.

When you love, you don't count the cost. Women, men, listen to this. Whenever you're counting the cost and you're cheap with someone, you don't really love them.

I know that sounds very direct, but I meant it to be direct. Whoever you love, that's who you spend on. That's why some guys have 75 pairs of sneakers, but if they go out with a girl, they say, let's do Dutch treat.

You pay your bill, I'll pay my bill. I need to get another pair of Nikes. When I first got a job, I was playing ball in the summer and they had a practicing in the summer.

And I just finished my freshman year. I think at college, I had a red shirt because I had transferred from the Naval Academy and they didn't let freshmen play right away then. So I was working out with the team, but couldn't play.

And I got, they got me a job with an alumni of the school in Queens and I got a job and my mother was happy. She's here now today. She maybe remembers this.

I'd fallen in love with my wife, was dating my wife. And now I get my first paycheck. Why are you clapping? I got my first paycheck.

I took it all. I went to the store and bought her what I thought she might like. Jewelry, cheap jewelry, this, that.

Am I right or wrong, Carol? And she made believe like it was nice when she opened it. She went, oh my, that's so nice. Yeah.

And I remember my mother saying, you got your first paycheck, where's the money? My mother, Eastern European, you save, you make the numbers count. And that's good. That's good.

I said, no, I spent, I bought Carol some stuff. Well, what did you buy her? I mean, what did you have left? Nothing. Couldn't you have just given her like, like a little present out of the money? No, I don't get what's funny about all this, but how many know when you love Jesus, you just, you get crazy.

Don't we need to be a little bit more in love, more crazy for Jesus. People are crazy for their gadgets. People are crazy for their cars.

People are crazy for their hobbies. People are crazy for their vacations. People are crazy and spend all kinds of money on all kinds of things.

Why do they spend that money? Because that's what they're interested in. And she was interested in Jesus. So he said, leave her alone, leave her alone.

So she gave me an expensive gift. She did a beautiful thing in me. She did a beautiful thing.

Wasn't that a song? When praise demands a sacrifice, even then I'll worship God. Something like that. In other words, leftovers.

What does that mean? You give leftovers to anyone. Like this past offering that we took. I'm not taking another offering.

This is not a ploy to get you to give. I'm just saying, I wonder how many people gave money that really mattered, that made him happy and how many were just leftover. And yet he's given you everything you have.

What? Tell me, look at me. Tell me what you have he didn't give you. Nothing.

Everything we have comes from him. Amen. And how we can get so consumed, but not this lady.

Oh, this lady. She just said, I don't care. She's crazy.

You know what? You shouldn't be doing that. Have some common sense. We know you appreciate him.

But I mean, be reasonable. No, she's not reasonable. She's breaking that thing, pouring it over his head.

And Jesus said, no, you leave her alone. She's done something very special for me. And you know what? It'll never, ever die.

Her story, as long as my gospel is being preached, her name will be mentioned. And I'm going to prompt this guy in Brooklyn to talk about it. One July in 2015, just to remind the people that worship never dies.

Look at me. When we were lifting our hands and praising God, that goes up. It never dies.

It's kept up there. It's kept. It never dies.

People die. Money loses its value, but praise, prayer, all communication with God, it has eternal shelf life. It just keeps there in that aroma in heaven.

Just we praise him because we love him. I don't know about you. I want to praise God more.

All in favor, say I. I want to praise God in places where people don't usually praise God. I want to go when I'm alone, but sometimes it'll, sometimes a hallelujah will pop out right while you're around people. Have you ever had that happen? And they don't even know what it's about.

You just go praise God. What was that? Well, just praise God. I want to be able to be not distracted by people.

You know, when I went in the ministry, I was really flopping as a pastor preaching because I was so insecure. And I have certain idiosyncrasies in my personality that it took me asking my wife after maybe six months in the pitch, keyboard player. I said, how am I doing? She said, the truth.

When your wife says that, it's not usually good when they say that. I said, yeah, the truth. And she said, not good, terrible.

I said, why? She's because that's not you. You're trying to act like a minister because I was insecure. I didn't think I could talk like this.

If you come to my office, this is exactly how I talk. Am I right, brothers? Am I right, Sylvia? This is it. I couldn't believe that.

I thought you had to act like a preacher. Praise God. Whoa, whoa.

I just felt that there, a little quickening. That's all acting. That's all acting.

I know why it's acting because I go with those guys to eat and none of them do that. And when I'm eating with them, they never go, whoa, whoa. Pass that salt, brother.

Whoa. So I had to die to all of that. And when I worship God, I cry.

I cried before when we were singing. I had to get a tissue. And I didn't want to cry in front of you.

I didn't want to cry in front of the audience. People think I'm having an emotional breakdown. Some people might've thought his sermons are so bad, even he's crying over them.

Whoa, that's heavy. But you know what? You got to get free and not care. Everybody just lift your hands up.

Close your eyes. Start worshiping God out loud. Go on.

Praise God. Come on. Certainly he's done something for you.

Are you nervous who's listening? Just let God hear what you have to say. Te amo, senior. Cristo, te amo.

Te amo, senior. We love you, Jesus. We love you.

We're in church. We praise you. Help us to praise you more during the week.

We honor you. We give you the fruit of our lips. Our tongues go up to you.

That's why you gave us that, so we could make noise for you, Lord. Forgive us for being embarrassed about praising you, Lord, for being in a straitjacket. We can't even praise the living God because we're so conscious of people.

We don't care about people. We care about you, Jesus, today. We love you.

We love you. We love you. We love you.

We love you. We love you. We love you.

We love you, Jesus. We praise you, Jesus. Jesus is here.

Just praise him. We love you, Jesus. We praise you, Jesus.

We honor you, Lamb of God. Worthy is the Lamb. Not unto us, but unto the Lamb be glory and honor and praise.

Not unto the Brooklyn Tabernacle, not unto a preacher, but let Jesus receive all the glory and honor and praise. Jesus, thank you for this service. Thank you for the body of Christ.

We praise you and we honor you today. Set us free to worship you more often in all different places. Help us to do it unconscious of what others might be thinking or feeling or their opinions.

Help us to focus on you, and help us to praise you even when it hurts, even when we have to wipe away tears or give an offering that is sacrificial. Help us not to be just sunny side Christians, but help us in everything to give you thanks and honor for you are worthy. Let everyone leave saying, I met God.

I met the living God. I felt God in that place. That's what we pray, Lord.

So we give you our time of expressing love one to another. Bless us. We pray it all in Jesus' name.

And everyone said, amen. All right, no more handshaking. I want you to hug about five or six people.

Come on, hug a bunch of people. Come on, hug somebody. Hug a bunch of people.

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