<u>Luke 13:18-30</u> December 15, 2019

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: Why do you think pastors get discouraged in ministry? [Let people engage]

Transition: Godly pastors have gone through low times when they have wondered if they have spent their lives in vain. Sometimes it seems as if the other side is winning. The world certainly is not getting better and better. There isn't a single Christian nation (or anything close) on the face of the earth. Evil people abound and seem to prosper. Godly people are a minority and even some of them fall into serious sins. If we look at what we ourselves have accomplished for the Lord, it seems so insignificant in the face of the huge task of establishing God's kingdom on this earth. So even we, as believers, can get discouraged as we serve the Lord.

The two parables we are getting ready to read are here to encourage all who serve the Lord Jesus Christ with the simple truth that His side is going to win. The mustard seed will grow into a tree with the birds nested in its branches. The leaven will spread throughout the whole lump. Let's read the text.

BOOK: The Parables of the Mustard Seed and the Yeast

¹⁸ Then Jesus asked, "What is the kingdom of God like? What shall I compare it to? ¹⁹ It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his garden. It grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air perched in its branches." ²⁰ Again he asked, "What shall I compare the kingdom of God to? ²¹ It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough."

The Narrow Door

²² Then Jesus went through the towns and villages, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem. ²³ Someone asked him, "Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?" He said to them, ²⁴ "Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to. ²⁵ Once the owner of the house gets up and closes the door, you will stand outside knocking and pleading, 'Sir, open the door for us.' "But he will answer, 'I don't know you or where you come from.' ²⁶ "Then you will say, 'We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.' ²⁷ "But he will reply, 'I don't know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!' ²⁸ "There will be weeping there, and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown out. ²⁹ People will come from east and west and north and south and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God. ³⁰ Indeed there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last."

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What did you most like about this passage? What resonated with you? [Let people engage]

- Q: What did you least like about this passage? [Let people engage]
- Q: What did you find in this passage that you didn't understand? [Let people engage]

Q: What do we learn about Jesus in this passage? [Let people engage]

LOOK:

The Lord has given all sinners an invitation to come to His feast, yet there are those who have refused or delayed accepting the invitation. At some point, the door is closed to join the feast. Jesus's message is that the delaying brings a *deadly consequence*. The longer sinners wait, the harder their hearts become. "Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts" (Heb. 4:7).

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). The Bible Exposition Commentary (Vol. 1, pp. 226-227). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

The parables in Luke 13:18–21 were probably spoken to the congregation just before Jesus and the Twelve departed from the synagogue. He had used these parables before and the disciples understood them (Matt. 13:31–33, 51). Some see in them a picture of the visible outward growth of the kingdom (the mustard seed) and the invisible inward influence of the kingdom (the leaven). By using these parables, Jesus was saying, "You Jewish religious leaders may hold to your dead traditions and oppose the truth, but God's living kingdom will still increase. Satan will be defeated!"

But, we must keep two other considerations in mind. First, Jesus had already used leaven as a picture of evil (Luke 12:1), and He was not likely to contradict Himself. Second, the context of Matthew 13 indicates opposition and seeming defeat for God's kingdom, not worldwide conquest. Yes, there will be ultimate victory; but meanwhile, much of the seed sown will bear no fruit, Satan will sow counterfeits, and the net will catch all kinds of fish, good and bad. I cannot find either in church history or in contemporary reports any proof that the kingdom of God has "permeated the whole world." In view of the population increase, we are losing ground!

The Jews knew their Scriptures and recognized the images that Jesus used. Leaven represented evil (Ex. 12:14–20), and a mighty tree pictured a great world kingdom (Ezek. 17:22–24; 31:3–9; Dan. 4:20–22). A mustard seed produces a shrub, not a great tree. The kingdom would be infected with false teaching (Gal. 5:1–9), and the small seed ("little flock," Luke 12:32) would grow into an organization that would be a home for Satan. (The birds represent the evil one, Matt. 13:19.) The professing church today fits both descriptions.

A Theological Question about Salvation (Luke 13:22–30)

The events recorded in John 9–10 fit between Luke 13:21 and 22. Note in John 10:40–42 that Jesus then left Judea and went beyond the Jordan into Perea. The events of Luke 13:22–17:10 took place in Perea as the Lord gradually moved toward Jerusalem.

The scribes often discussed the question of how many people would be saved, and somebody asked Jesus to give His thoughts on the issue. As with the question about Pilate, Jesus immediately made the matter personal. "The question is not how many will be saved, but whether or not *you* will be saved! Get that settled first, and then we can discuss what you can do to help get others saved."

I sometimes receive "theological letters" from radio listeners who want to argue about predestination, election, and other difficult doctrines. When I reply, I usually ask them about their prayer life, their witnessing, and their work in the local church. That often ends the correspondence. Too many professed Christians want to discuss these profound doctrines, but they do not want to put them into practice by seeking to win people to Jesus Christ! D.L. Moody prayed, "Lord, save the elect, and then elect some more!"

"Many ... will seek to enter in, and shall not be able" (Luke 13:24). Why? The parable tells us why, and it focuses primarily on the Jewish people of that day. However, it has a personal application to all of us today.

Jesus pictured the kingdom as a great feast, with the patriarchs and prophets as honored guests (Luke 13:28). But many of the people who were invited waited too long to respond; and, when

they arrived at the banquet hall, it was too late and the door was shut (see Matt. 22:1–14; Luke 14:15–24).

But why did they wait so long? The parable suggests several reasons. To begin with, salvation is not easy; the sinner must enter a narrow gate and walk a narrow way (Luke 13:24; also see 9:23ff). The world's crowd is on the easy way, the way that leads to destruction (Matt. 7:13–14), and it is much easier to walk with them.

Another reason for their delay was their false sense of security. Jesus had been among them; they had even eaten with Him and enjoyed His fellowship, *yet they had never trusted Him.* God gave the nation many privileges and opportunities, but they wasted them (see Luke 10:13–16). God is long-suffering; however, there comes a time when even God shuts the door.

Pride also played a big part: they would not humble themselves before God. In their own eyes, they were first, but in God's eyes, they were last—*and the Gentiles would come and take their place!* (see Matt. 21:43) Imagine the "unclean Gentile dogs" sitting at the feast with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, while the unbelieving Jews were outside!

These people were lost because they depended on their ancient religion to save them; but Jesus saw them as "workers of iniquity," not doers of righteousness (Isa. 64:4; Titus 1:16). It takes more than reverence for tradition to get into God's kingdom!

But the major reason was given by Jesus Himself: "Ye would not" (Luke 13:34). Their minds had been instructed by the Word (Luke 13:26), and their hearts had been stirred by His mighty works, but their wills were stubborn and would not submit to Him. *This is the deadly consequence of delay*. The longer sinners wait, the harder their hearts become. "Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts" (Heb. 4:7).

The Spanish composer Manuel de Falla was notorious for not answering his mail. When he heard that a friend had died, the composer said, "What a pity! He died before I answered his letter, which he sent me five years ago!"

When sinners fail to answer *God's* invitation to His feast, *they are the ones who die*. They are "thrust out" of the joys of the kingdom and are punished with "weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Luke 13:28). It is a picture of people who are overwhelmed with regret because they see how foolish they were to delay; but, alas, it is too late. One of the agonies of hell will be the remembrance of opportunities wasted.

What is the answer? "Strive to enter in at the narrow gate!" (Luke 13:24) The word *strive* comes from the sports arena and describes an athlete giving his best to win the contest. Our English word *agonize* comes from this word. If people today would put as much effort into things spiritual as they do things athletic, they would be much better off.

Martin, J. A. (1985). Isaiah. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 240-241)

f. Jesus' teaching about the kingdom of God (13:18–21) (Matt. 13:31–33; Mark 4:30–32).

13:18–21. This passage is actually a hinge between Jesus' teaching of the multitudes (12:54–13:21) and His teaching about the people of **the kingdom** (13:22–17:10). Some feel that in these brief parables about the **Mustard Seed** (a mustard tree, from a tiny seed, grows as tall as 30 feet in one season!) and the **Yeast** Jesus was teaching something positive about the kingdom. It seems better, however, to understand these parables as teaching something undesirable. Like pervading yeast, evil will enter the Age and become all-pervasive. This seems to be true since Luke placed this teaching immediately after the synagogue leader's rejection of Jesus' work on the Sabbath.

3. JESUS'S TEACHING ABOUT THE PEOPLE OF THE KINGDOM (13:22–17:10)

In this section Luke recorded Jesus' teachings concerning who is and who is not a member of the kingdom. Throughout this section the theme of entering into the kingdom is often symbolized as taking part in a feast or banquet (13:29; 14:7–24; 15:23; 17:7–10). The kingdom was yet to come. Those who enter are those who respond positively to God by accepting the Messiah and His kingdom message.

a. Jesus' teaching that most of Israel will be excluded from the kingdom (13:22–35).

13:22–30. **Jesus** taught that many from Israel will not be in **the kingdom** whereas many from outside Israel will be. **Someone asked** Jesus if **only a few people** were **going to be saved**. Apparently, His followers were somewhat discouraged that His message of the kingdom was not sweeping the nation as they thought it would. They saw that Jesus continually met opposition as well as acceptance. Jesus' teaching was clear—a person must accept what He was saying in order to enter the kingdom. To a Jewish mind salvation was related to the kingdom, that is, a person was saved in order to enter into God's kingdom.

Jesus responded to the person's question with a story of a man who was giving a **feast** (symbolic of the kingdom, v. 29). After he closed **the door** to the banquet, no one else could come in for they were too late (v. 25). In fact, the host of the feast actually called them **evildoers** (v. 27). The latecomers responded that they had eaten and drunk with the host and that he had **taught in** their **streets** (v. 26), an obvious reference to Jesus' ministry among the people of that generation. Jesus' point in telling the story was that the people had to respond to His invitation at that time, for a time would come when it would be too late and they would not be allowed in the kingdom.

Jesus spoke directly, telling the crowds that judgment would come on those who refused His message: **There will be weeping ... and gnashing of teeth** and they will be **thrown out**, that is, not allowed to enter the kingdom. (On "weeping and gnashing of teeth" see comments on Matt. 13:42.) But godly ones in the nation (represented by **Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets**) will be **in the kingdom of God.**

These remarks were revolutionary to Jesus' hearers. Most of them assumed that because they were physically related to Abraham they would naturally enter into the promised kingdom. However, His next words were even more revolutionary—in fact devastating—to those who assumed that *only* the Jewish nation would be involved in the kingdom. Jesus explained that Gentiles would be added to the kingdom in place of Jewish people (Luke 13:29–30). **People** coming from the four corners of the world represent various population groups. Those listening to Jesus' words should not have been surprised by this teaching because the prophets had often said the same thing. However, Jews in Jesus' day believed that Gentiles were inferior to them. When Jesus had begun His ministry in Nazareth, His teaching of Gentile inclusion had so maddened the crowd that they tried to kill Him (4:13–30). The Jewish people considered themselves to be **first** in every way, but they would be **last**, that is, they would be left out of the kingdom. In contrast, some Gentiles, considered **last**, would be in the kingdom and would really be **first** in importance (13:30).

Stein, R. H. (1992). Luke (Vol. 24, pp. 375-381). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Context

Luke concluded the first section of his travel narrative with the parables of the mustard seed and leaven. The parable of the mustard seed appears in Mark 4:30–32. Both parables, the first involving a man sowing mustard seed in his garden and the second involving a woman adding leaven to flour, are analogies used to describe God's kingdom. How these parables relate to the preceding material is unclear. Luke's intent may have been to emphasize that since God's kingdom had already come (13:18–21), the call to repent (13:3, 5) should be heeded, for both Jesus' hearers and his readers were living in the last period of God's grace (13:6–9). Although the present realization of the kingdom may appear insignificant (like a mustard seed or a little yeast), its power is already manifest (13:10–13), and its consummation will be immeasurable. The contrast between the size of the mustard seed and the leaven at the start compared to their final state illustrates this point. It is this contrast between the beginning and the end, rather than the idea of growth, that is the point of the two parables. As Marshall notes: "The stress is not so much on the idea of growth in itself as on the certainty that what appears tiny and insignificant will prove to have been the beginning of a mighty kingdom."

Comments

13:18 What is the kingdom of God like? The basic point of the following analogies is not to be limited to one part of the picture such as the man, the seed, the tree, or the birds. The basic point is to be found in the total picture of a small mustard seed that becomes a tree. See comments on 7:31.

13:19 Mustard seed. By use of overstatement ("the smallest of all your seeds"), Matt 13:32 describes the proverbial smallness of the mustard seed. In contrast a mustard plant can grow to a height of eight to twelve feet.

A man. Since this stands in parallel with "woman" in 13:21, it should not be translated generically "someone" as in the NRSV. Note again Luke's balance in using one example with a man and one with a woman.

Planted in his garden. Matthew 13:31 has "field." According to rabbinic teaching (*Kil'ayim* 3:2), mustard was not to be grown in a garden.

Grew. Nothing is made of this aspect of the parable. The use of the past tense (a culminative aorist) indicates that the point of the parable is not the growing process but the contrast between the beginning and the end.

And became a tree. There is no hint of irony in calling the end product of the mustard seed a tree. There is an amazing difference between the insignificant mustard seed and its final product. An alleged comparison with the cedars of Lebanon is nowhere suggested. The point Luke wanted Theophilus to get was that the consummation of God's kingdom would be as different from its inception as a mature mustard plant was from its seed.

The birds of the air perched in its branches. Although it has been alleged that birds cannot nest in a mustard "tree," it is possible. The reference to "birds" is frequently interpreted allegorically as a reference to Gentiles. If "all" had been added ("all the birds"), this interpretation would be more plausible. The reference to birds (cf. Dan 4:12, 21; Ezek 17:23; 31:6) may be an allusion to the Gentiles, but Luke's primary purpose in mentioning them was to emphasize the size of the final product.

13:20 What shall I compare the kingdom of God to? This is the equivalent of Luke 13:18 but combined into a single sentence.

Yeast. See comments on 12:1. This would be sourdough.

A woman took. Luke balanced the example of the "man" in 13:19.

A large amount of flour. "Large amounts" is literally *three measures (sata)*. This would be slightly more than a bushel. "Three" probably is used as a round number (cf. 13:7; Gen 18:6).

Until. One should not press this for allegorical significance.

It worked all through. "Worked all through" is literally *leavened*. The past tense (a culminative aorist) again reveals that the point of the parable is not in the growth process of the sourdough but in the contrast between its small size at the beginning and its final condition.

The Lukan Message

These two parables fit well the Lukan teaching that with Jesus' coming the long-awaited kingdom had arrived. Luke emphasized this theme more than any other Synoptic writer. See Introduction 8 (2). Yet the kingdom's arrival, while evident to all whose hearts were right (Luke 8:15), had not been as expected. While the demonic powers had been shaken and defeated, this world's rulers were oblivious to its arrival. They did not see that in the person of Jesus (and for Luke's readers in the Spirit's work in the life of the church) the kingdom was "now." When the consummation comes, however, the kingdom will be obvious for all to see, for it will be "on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt 6:10). In that day what now appears to be as small as a mustard seed will be a great tree; what appears to be a little speck of yeast will be a large leavened mass. For Luke's readers these parables provided assurance that the already "now" had arrived as well as assurance that the "not yet" would soon come.

2. The Second Mention of the Journey to Jerusalem (13:22–17:10)

Context

Luke began the second part of his travel narrative by mentioning, for the first time since 9:51, 53, Jesus' journey toward Jerusalem (13:22). What follows is a loose collection of Jesus' sayings that deal with entrance into God's kingdom (13:18–21). This section begins with a Lukan summary of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem, and the theme for what follows is given by the question, "Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?" (13:23). Jesus' earlier teachings have implied this. Jesus did not answer this question directly but instead followed it with a series of warnings. The first two (13:24 [cf. Matt 7:13–14] and 13:25–27 [cf. Matt 7:22–23]) are connected by the term "door," although the analogies are different. The first exhorts the hearer to enter through the narrow door which leads to the kingdom. The second changes the door imagery, pointing out that Jesus controls the door of the kingdom, and unless one commits to following him now, he will deny that person entrance (9:26; 12:8–9). The similarity between the second warning and the parable of the wise and foolish maidens is evident (Matt 25:1–13).

The third warning continues the judgment theme, indicating that many in Israel ("you yourselves," Luke 13:28) will be excluded from the messianic banquet with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, whereas others from east, west, north, and south (clearly Gentiles) will share in it. This illustrates that many who expected to enter God's kingdom (the "first") will be excluded ("last"), while outsiders who had expected to be excluded (the "last") will be included ("first"). The chagrin of those who are excluded is shown by their weeping and gnashing of teeth (13:28). Participation in the kingdom is described as taking one's place at the feast in God's kingdom (13:29; cf. Matt 8:11–12), i.e., sharing in the messianic banquet. The account concludes with a proverb describing the great reversal (Luke 13:30; cf. Matt 19:30).

Comments

13:22 Jesus went through. The imperfect is better translated *was going through*. Compare 9:51, 53.

Teaching. Compare 4:15, 31–32, 43–44.

To Jerusalem. Compare 9:51, 53.

13:23 Lord. "Lord" probably meant *Sir* in the original context, but Luke and Theophilus understood it as "Lord." See comments on 6:46.

Are only a few people going to be saved? In *Sanhedrin* 10:1 it is stated that "all Israelites have a share in the world to come." Jesus' audience sensed that his teaching was quite different. See "Context" for references (cf. also 2 Esdr 7:47; 9:15). For the same Greek construction see Luke 22:49; Acts 1:6; 7:1; 19:2. As in Acts 1:6, Jesus did not speculate on the abstract question, which belongs in God's domain, but instead addressed the personal dimension of this issue, i.e., the individual's responsibility. Jesus' hearers (and Luke's) should concern themselves with their own areas of accountability, not God's. The question, however, does receive an implicit answer in the next verse. For "saved" see comments on 7:50.

13:24 Make every effort to enter. That is, repent (Luke 13:3, 5). Compare 16:16.

Many ... will try to enter and will not be able to. The analogy should not be pressed into the idea that the difficulty is due to one's inability to earn/acquire this right. The reason some are not able to enter does not have to do with being good enough but with the willingness to repent (cf. 13:3, 5), which they refuse to do. The main point of the verse centers on the need to make sure one is part of the "few" who have through repentance and faith experienced God's mercy and grace.

13:25 A new analogy is given that also involves a door, but the emphasis is less on the individual seeking to enter and more on the Lord's control over who enters and that the time when it is possible to enter will come to an end. The parable of the barren fig tree (13:6-9) has already raised this issue. Matthew 25:1–13 is an expansion of this theme. The time for enrollment is limited. The period of grace will irrevocably end, and the time of judgment will begin.

The owner of the house. "Owner" evidently refers to Jesus rather than God because the owner ate in their presence and taught in their streets (Luke 13:26).

Sir. The NIV translates the Greek term kyrios from the standpoint of the picture, but from the understanding of Luke and his readers it would be translated better "Lord" (RSV). See comments on 6:46.

I don't know you. Compare Matt 7:21–23; 25:41–45; John 10:14, 27; 1 Cor 8:3; 2 Tim 2:19.

13:26 We ate and drank with you. The mere fact of being physically in Jesus' presence or being acquainted with him is not sufficient for entrance into God's kingdom, any more than membership and participation in church is sufficient today. One must repent and believe. See Introduction 8 (6). For Luke's readers this served as a warning that partaking of baptism and the Lord's Supper did not guarantee entrance into God's kingdom (cf. 1 Cor 10:1–5).

13:27 I don't know you. The repetition (cf. 13:25) adds emphasis.

Away from me. Compare Ps 6:9 (LXX) and Matt 7:23. The scene is the final judgment (25:41).

Evildoers! "Evildoers" is literally *unrighteous*. Compare Luke 16:8–9; 18:6; Acts 1:18; 8:23. The term is not found in Matthew or Mark.

13:28 Weeping ... and gnashing of teeth. This is a favorite expression in Matthew to describe the horrors of eternal punishment.

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. This threesome symbolizes Israel.

All the prophets. Compare Luke 11:50; 24:27; Acts 3:18, 24; 10:43; but elsewhere in the Gospels it is found only in Matt 11:13.

In the kingdom of God. "In the kingdom of God" means at the consummation of the kingdom of God.

You yourselves. Matthew 8:12 uses the expression "subjects [literally *sons*] of the kingdom." For both Evangelists this meant Israelites, who are contrasted to the people from east, west, north, and south, i.e., Gentiles, who enter (Luke 13:29). Compare Acts 13:46; 18:6; 28:28. Jesus' unrepentant hearers are contrasted with the faithful patriarchs and believing Gentiles.

Thrown out. This should be understood as exclusion, for they are not expelled after entry but are not allowed to enter the consummated kingdom.

13:29 People. Matthew 8:11 has "many," but Luke used a different term, probably to contrast with the use of "many" in Luke 13:24. For Luke's readers this clearly meant Gentiles.

East and west and north and south. Compare Ps 107:3.

Take their places at the feast. The banquet metaphor is often used to describe God's kingdom. **13:30 Last ... first.** Compare Matt 19:30; 20:16; Mark 10:31. The parallels in Matthew and Mark indicate that Jesus used this proverb primarily to signify the admission of Israel's outcasts (tax collectors, sinners, the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind) and the exclusion of the religious elite (Pharisees, scribes, lawyers, priests). Luke and his readers, however, also would have understood this in terms of Acts 13:46; 18:6; and 28:28, i.e., the unbelief of much of Israel and the inclusion of the Gentiles. The lack of the article before "last" and "first" indicates that neither all the last nor all the first would experience this reversal. Some Jews (the disciples and the church of Acts 1–9) did believe. The saying contrasts not all the last and all the first but "last ones" kinds of people and "first ones" kinds of people. Both the NIV and the RSV seek to convey this in their translations. Compare Luke 1:51–53; 2:34; 6:20–26; 14:11, 15–24.

The Lukan Message

This section centers around a key theme, if not the key theme, of Luke-Acts: salvation. Who will be saved? This was not simply an abstract philosophical question for Luke. He wanted his readers to make every effort to enter the narrow gate (13:24) so they could share in the messianic banquet (13:29), i.e., be saved (13:23). Thus, although written to Christians (see Introduction 3), through Luke-Acts he sought not only to assure his readers of the truth of what they had been taught (Luke 1:4) but also to have them make sure they truly were participants in this great salvation. Israel's example was a warning to them. The great reversal that had taken place (13:28–30) warned that they too could fall away after believing for a time (8:13). Ellis notes that "by his conclusion (30) Luke appears to broaden the application to all followers of Jesus who do not strive to enter 'the narrow door' " (13:24; 2 Pet 1:10). Although "all" can be saved, for "God does not show favoritism but accepts people from every nation who fear him and do what is right" (Acts 10:34–35), not all people will be saved.

The implicit Christology found in this passage should not be missed. Jesus is the one who controls the destiny of humanity. He possesses the keys of God's kingdom and as a result also of death and Hades (Rev 1:18). One's ultimate destiny is determined by whether Jesus will say on the final day "I know you" (Luke 13:25–27). See comments on 7:23; 9:24–26. This theme is, of course, not unique to Luke (cf. Mark 8:35, 38; Matt 7:21–23; John 3:36). A Christological emphasis is also found in the address "Lord" given Jesus in Luke 13:23. Another theme related to salvation is the theme of Israel's rejection by God. They are excluded from the future messianic banquet (13:28), for the great reversal has taken place (13:30). See Introduction 8 (5).

The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). (Lk 13:18-30). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

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