

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

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A SERMON
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AT NEW PARK CHAPEL, SOUTHWARK.

“And I will make them and the places round about my hill a blessing; and I will cause the shower to come down in his season; there shall be showers of blessing.”
Ezekiel 34:26.

The chapter (Ezekiel 34) that I read at the commencement of the service is a prophetic one. I understand it's meaning to refer to the relation, not to the condition of the Jews during the captivity and their subsequent happiness when they should return to their land, but to a state into which they should fall after they had been restored to their country under Nehemiah and Ezra, and in which state they still continue to the present day. The prophet tells us that the shepherds then, instead of feeding the flock, fed themselves. They trod the grass, instead of allowing the sheep to eat it and they fouled the waters with their feet. This is an exact description of the state of Judea after the captivity, for then there arose the Scribes and Pharisees who took the key of knowledge and would not enter themselves nor allow others to enter, who laid heavy burdens on men's shoulders and would not touch them with one of their fingers, who made religion to consist entirely in sacrifices and ceremonies, and imposed such a burden on the people that they cried out, "What a weariness it is!" That same evil has continued with the poor Jews to the present day and should you read the nonsense of the Talmud and the Gemara, and see the burdens they laid upon them, you would say, "Verily, they have idle shepherds." They give the sheep no food. They trouble them with fanciful superstitions and silly views, and instead of telling them that the Messiah is already come, they delude them with the idea that there is a Messiah yet to come who shall restore Judea and raise it to its glory. The Lord pronounces a curse upon these Pharisees and Rabbis. These who "thrust with side and with shoulder," those evil shepherds who will not suffer the sheep to lie down, neither will feed them with good pasture.

But after having described this state, he prophesies better times for the poor Jew. The day is coming when the careless shepherds shall be as nought, when the power of the Rabbis shall cease, when the traditions of the Mishna and the Talmud shall be cast aside. The hour is approaching when the tribes shall go up to their own country, when Judea, so long a howling wilderness, shall once more blossom like the rose, when, if the Temple itself be not restored, yet on Zion's hill shall be raised some Christian building where the chants of solemn praise shall be heard, as ever of old the Psalms of David were sung in the Tabernacle.

Not long shall it be ere they shall come—shall come from distant lands, where'er they rest or roam. And she who has been the off-scouring of all things, whose name has been a proverb and a byword, shall become the glory of all lands. Dejected Zion shall raise her head, shaking herself from dust, darkness, and the dead. Then shall the Lord feed His people and make them and the places round about His hill a blessing. I think we do not attach sufficient importance to the restoration of the Jews. We do not think enough of it. But certainly, if there is anything promised in the Bible, it is this. I imagine that you cannot read the Bible without seeing clearly that there is to be an actual restoration of the children of Israel. "Thither they shall go up; they shall come with weeping unto Zion and with supplications unto Jerusalem." May that happy day soon come! For when the Jews are restored, then the fullness of the Gentiles shall be gathered in. And as soon as they return, then Jesus will come upon Mount Zion to reign with His ancients gloriously and the halcyon days of the Millennium shall then dawn. We shall then know every man to be a brother and a friend. Christ shall rule with universal sway.

This, then, is the meaning of the text that God would make Jerusalem and the places round about His hill a blessing. I shall not, however, use it so this morning, but I shall use it in a more confined sense, or perhaps in a more enlarged sense, as it applies to the church of Jesus Christ and to this particular church with which you and I stand connected. "I will make them and the places round about my hill a blessing; and I will cause the shower to come down in his season; there shall be showers of blessing."

There are two things here spoken of. First, *Christ's church is to be a blessing*. Secondly, *Christ's church is to be blessed*. These two things you will find in the different sentences of the text.

I. First, CHRIST'S CHURCH IS TO BE A BLESSING.

"I will make them and the places round about my hill a blessing." The object of God in choosing a people before all worlds was not only to save that people, but through them to confer essential benefits upon the whole human race. When He chose Abraham, He did not elect him simply to be God's friend and the recipient of peculiar privileges, but He chose him to make him, as it were, the conservator of truth. He was to be the ark in which the truth should be hidden. He was to be the keeper of the covenant in behalf of the whole world. And when God chooses any men by His sovereign grace and makes them Christ's, He does it not only for their own sake, that they may be saved, but for the world's sake. For know you not that, "You are the light of the world!"—"A city set upon a hill which cannot be hid." "You are the salt of the earth." And when God makes you salt, it is not only that you may have salt in yourselves, but that like salt, you may preserve the whole mass. If He makes you leaven, it is that like the little leaven, you may leaven the whole lump. Salvation is not a selfish thing. God does not give it for us to keep to ourselves, but that we may thereby be made the means of blessing to others. And the great day shall declare that there is not a man living on the surface of the earth but has received a blessing in some way or other through God's gift of the Gospel. The very keeping of the wicked in life and granting of the reprieve was purchased with the death of Jesus, and through His sufferings and death, the temporal blessings which both we and they enjoy are bestowed on us. The Gospel was sent that it might first bless those that embrace it and then expand, so as to make them a blessing to the whole human race.

In thus speaking of the church as a blessing, we shall notice three things. First, here is *divinity*, "I will make them a blessing." Secondly, here is *personality of religion*, "I will make *them* a blessing." And thirdly, here is *the development of religion*, "and the *places* round about my hill."

1. First, with regard to this blessing which God will cause His church to be, here is *divinity*. It is God, the everlasting JEHOVAH speaking. He says, "I will make them a blessing." None of us can bless others unless God has first blessed us. We need divine workmanship. "I will make them a blessing by helping them and by constraining them." God makes His people a blessing by helping them. What can we do without God's help? I stand and preach to thousands or it may be hundreds. What have I done, unless a greater than man has been in the pulpit with me? I work in the Sabbath-schools, what can I do, unless the Master is there, teaching the children with me?

We want God's aid in every position, and once give us that assistance, there is no telling with how little labor we may become a blessing, Ah! a few words sometimes will be more of a blessing than a whole sermon. You take some little prattler on your knee, and some few words that you say to him he remembers and makes use of in after years. I knew a gray-headed old man who was in the habit of doing this. He once took a boy to a certain tree and said, "Now, John, you kneel down at that tree and I will kneel down with you." He knelt down and prayed, and asked God to convert him and save his soul. "Now," he said, "perhaps you will come to this tree again and if you are not converted, you will remember that I asked under this tree that God would save your soul." That young man went away and forgot the old man's prayer, but it chanced as God would have it, that he walked down that field again and saw a tree. It seemed as if the old man's name was cut in the bark. He recollected what he prayed for, and the prayer was not fulfilled, but he dared not pass the tree without kneeling down to pray himself, and there was his spiritual birthplace. The simplest observation of the Christian shall be made a

blessing, if God helps him. “His leaf also shall not wither”—the simplest word he speaks shall be treasured up and whatever he does shall prosper.

But there is *constraint* here. “I will *make* them a blessing.” I will give them to be a blessing. I will compel them to be a blessing. I can say myself that I never did anything which was a blessing to my fellow-creatures without feeling compelled to do it. I thought of going to a Sabbath-school to teach. On a certain day, someone called—asked me, begged me, prayed me to take his class. I could not refuse to go, and there I was held hand and foot by the superintendent, and was compelled to go on.

I was asked to address the children. I thought I could not, but no one else was there to do it, so I stood up and stammered out a few words. And I recollect the first occasion on which I attempted to preach to the people—I am sure I had no wish to do it—but there was no one else in the place and the congregation must go away without a single word of warning or address? How could I suffer it? I felt forced to address them. And so it has been with whatever I have laid my hand to. I have always felt a kind of impulse which I could not resist, but moreover, felt placed by Providence in such a position that I had no wish to avoid the duty, and if I had desired it, could not have helped myself. And so it is with God’s people. If they go through their lives, wherever they have been made a blessing, they will find that God seems to have thrust them into the vineyard.

Such-and-such a man was once rich. What good was he in the world? He did but loll in his carriage. He did but little good and was of little service to his fellow-creatures. Says God, “I will make him a blessing”—so He strips away his riches and brings him into low circumstances. He is then brought into association with the poor, and his superior education and intellect make him a blessing to them. God makes him a blessing. Another man was naturally very timid. He would not pray at the prayer meeting, he would hardly like to join the church. Soon he gets into a position in which he cannot help himself. “I will *make* him a blessing.” And as sure as ever you are a servant of God, He will *make* you a blessing. He will have none of His gold in the lump. He will hammer it out and make it a blessing.

I verily believe there are some in my congregation to whom God has given power to preach His name. They do not know it, perhaps, but God will make it known by-and-by. I would have every man look and see whether God is making him do a certain thing, and when once he feels the impulse, let him by no means ever check it. I am somewhat of a believer in the doctrine of the Quakers as to the impulses of the Spirit and I fear lest I should check one of them. If a thought crosses my mind, “Go to such a person’s house,” I always like to do it, because I do not know but what it may be from the Spirit. I understand this verse to mean something like that. “I will make them a blessing. I will force them to do good. If I cannot make a sweet scent come from them in any other way, I will pound them in the mortar of affliction. If they have seed and the seed cannot be scattered in any other way, I will send a rough wind to blow the downy seed everywhere.” “I will *make* them a blessing.” If you have never been *made* a blessing to anyone, depend upon it, you are not a child of God, for JEHOVAH says, “I *will* make them a blessing.”

2. But notice, next, the *personality* of the blessing. “I will make *them* a blessing.” “I will make each member of the church a blessing.” Many people come up to the house of prayer where the church assembles and you say, “Well, what are you doing at such-and-such a place where you attend?” “Well, *we* are doing so-and so.” “How do you spell *we*?” “It is a plain monosyllable,” say you. “Yes, but do you put *I* in ‘we’?” “No.” There are a great many people who could easily spell “we” without an *I* in it, for though they say, “We have been doing so-and-so,” they do not say, “How much have I done? Did I do anything in it? Yes, this chapel has been enlarged. What did I subscribe? Two pence!” Of course it is done. Those who paid the money have done it. “We preach the Gospel.” Do we, indeed? Yes, we sit in our pew and listen a little and do not pray for a blessing. “We have got such a large Sunday school.” Did you ever teach in it? “We have got a very good working-society.” Did you ever go to work in it? That is not the way to spell, “we.” It is, “I will make *them* a blessing.” When Jerusalem was built, every man began nearest his own house. That is where you must begin to build or to do something. Do not let us tell a lie about it. If we do not have some share in the building, if we neither handle the trowel nor the

spear, let us not talk about *our* church. For the text says, “I will make *them* a blessing,” every one of them.

“But sir, what can I do? I am nothing but a father at home. I am so full of business, I can only see my children a little.” But in your business, do you ever have any servants? “No, I am a servant myself.” You have fellow-servants? “No, I work alone.” Do you work alone, then, and live alone, like a monk in a cell? I don’t believe that. But you have fellow-servants at work, cannot you say a word to their conscience? “I don’t like to intrude religion into business.” Quite right too, so say I. When I am at business, let it be business. When you are at religion, let it be religion. But do you ever have an opportunity? Why, you cannot go into an omnibus, or a railway carriage, but what you can say something for Jesus Christ. I have found it so and I don’t believe I am different from other people. *Cannot do anything?* Cannot you put a tract in your hat and drop it where you go? Cannot you speak a word to a child? Where does this man come from that cannot do anything? There is a spider on the wall, but he takes hold on kings’ palaces and spins his web to rid the world of noxious flies. There is a nettle in the corner of the churchyard, but the physician tells me it has its virtues. There is a tiny star in the sky, but that is noted in the chart and the mariner looks at it. There is an insect under water, but it builds a rock. God made all these things for something, but here is a man that God made and gave him nothing at all to do? I do not believe it. God never makes useless things. He has no superfluous workmanship. I care not what you are. You have something to do. And oh! may God show you what it is and then make you do it, by the wondrous compulsion of His providence and His grace.

3. But we have to notice, in the third place, *the development of Gospel blessing*. “I will make them a blessing,” but it does not end there. “And the places round about my hill.” Religion is an expansive thing. When it begins in the heart, at first it is like a tiny grain of mustard seed, but it gradually increases and becomes a great tree, so that the birds of the air lodge in its branches thereof. A man cannot be religious to himself, “No man lives to himself and no man dies to himself.” You have heard, a score of times, that if you do but drop a pebble in a brook it causes a small ring at first, then another outside of that and then another, and another, till the influence of the pebble is perceptible over the entire bosom of the water. So it is when God makes His people a blessing. “I will make a minister a blessing to one or two. I will then make him a blessing to a hundred. I will then make him a blessing to thousands, and then I will make those thousands a blessing. I will make each one individually a blessing and when I have done that, I will make all the places round about a blessing. I will make them a blessing.” I hope we shall never be satisfied, as members of Park Street, until we are a blessing not only to ourselves, but to all the places round about our hill. What are the places round about our hill? I think they are first, our agencies, secondly, our neighborhood, and thirdly, the churches adjacent to us.

First, there are our agencies. There is our Sabbath-school—how near that is to our hill? I speak a great deal about this, because I want it to be brought into notice. I intend to preach a practical sermon this morning, to move some of you to come and teach in the Sabbath-school, for there we require some suitable men to “come up to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty.” Therefore I mention the Sabbath-school as a place very near to the hill. It ought to be just at the very foot of it. Yea, it ought to be so near the hill that very many may pass from it to the church.

Then there is our Visiting and Christian Instruction Society which we have for the visiting of this neighborhood. I trust that has been made a blessing. God has sent among us a man who labors zealously and earnestly in visiting the sick. I have, as the superintendent of my beloved brother, the missionary, a regular account of his labors. His report has most highly gratified me and I am able to bear testimony to the fact that he is very efficiently laboring around us. I want that Society to have all your sympathy and strength. I consider him as a Joshua, with whom you are to go forth by hundreds to those who live in the neighborhood. Do you not know what dark places there are? Walk down a street a little to the right. See the shops open on a Sunday. Some, thank God, that used to open them, now come and worship with us. We shall have more yet, for “the earth is the LORD’S and the fullness thereof,” and why should not we have it? My brethren, as you visit the sick or distribute tracts from door to door, make this your prayer—

that this Society, being one of the places round about our hill, may be made a blessing! Let me not forget any agency connected with this church. There are several more which are places round about our hill and the Lord has just put it into my heart to fashion other societies, which shall be made a blessing to this hill and in a little while you shall hear of them.

We have several brethren in this congregation to whom God has given a mouth of utterance. These are about to form themselves into a society for proclaiming the Word of God. Where God has so blessed His church, and made us to be so noted and named among the people, why should we not keep on? We have been brought up to a great pitch of fervency and love. Now is the time for doing something. While the iron is hot, why not strike and fashion it? I believe we have the materials not only for making a church here that shall be the glory of the Baptist churches in London, but for making churches everywhere throughout the metropolis. And we have more plans on hand which matured by sober judgment and backed by prudence, shall yet make this metropolis more honored than it has been by the sound of the pure Gospel and the proclamation of the pure Word of God. May God make all our agencies—the places round about our hill—a blessing.

But next, there is the neighborhood. I am paralyzed, sometimes when I think that we are of so little service to the neighborhood, though this is a green oasis in the midst of a great spiritual desert. Just at the back of us, we could find you hundreds of Roman Catholics and men of the very worst character. And it is sad to think that we cannot make this place a blessing to them. It is made a great blessing to you, my hearers, but you do not come from this district. You come from anywhere and nowhere, some of you, I suppose. People say, “There is something doing in that chapel, look at the crowd, but we cannot get in!” This one thing I ask—never come here to gratify your curiosity. You that are members of other congregations, just consider it your duty to stay at home. There are many stray sheep about. I would rather have them than you. Keep to your own place. I do not want to rob other ministers. Do not come here from charity. We are much obliged to you for your kindly intentions, but we would rather have your room than your company, if you are members of other churches. We want sinners to come—sinners of every sort. But do not let us have that sort of men whose ears are everlastingly itching for some new preacher who are saying, “I want something else, I want something else.” Oh! do, I beseech you, for God’s sake, be of some good, and if you are running about from one place to another, you can never expect to be. Do you know what is said of rolling stones? Ah! you have heard of that. They “gather no moss.” Now, don’t be rolling stones, but keep at home. God, however, so help us as to make us a blessing to the neighborhood! I long to see something done for the people around. We must open our arms to them. We must go out into the open air to them. We must and will preach God’s Gospel to them. Let, then, the people around listen to the word of the Gospel, and may it be said, “That place is the cathedral of Southwark!” So it is now. Out of it goes a blessing. God is pouring out a blessing upon it.

What else do we mean by the places round about our hill? We mean the churches adjacent. I cannot but rejoice in the prosperity of many churches around us, but as our beloved brother, Mr. Sherman, said last Thursday morning, “It is not invidious to say that there are very few churches that are in a prosperous state, but that taking the churches at large, they are in a deplorable condition. It is only here and there,” said he, “that God is pouring out His Spirit. But most of the churches are lying like barges at Black Friars Bridge when the tide is down—right in the mud—and all the king’s horses and all the king’s men cannot pull them off, till the tide comes and sets them afloat.” Who can tell then, what good may be done by this church? If there is a light in this candlestick, let others come and light their candles by it. If there is a flame here, let the flame spread until all the neighboring churches shall be lit up with the glory. Then indeed shall we be made the rejoicing of the earth, for there is never a revival in one spot, but it shall affect others. Who shall tell, then, where it shall end?

***“Fly abroad, you mighty Gospel.
Win and conquer, never cease.”***

And it never will cease, when God once makes the places round about His hill a blessing.

II. The second point is that God's people are not only to be a blessing, but **THEY ARE TO BE BLESSED.**

For read the second part of the verse. "And I will cause the shower to come down in his season; there shall be showers of blessing." It is somewhat singular, as a prognostication of the showers of blessings we hope to receive here, that God sent us showers on the first day of opening. If I were a believer in omens, I would pray that as it rained the first day, so may it rain every day since. When it stops, may the chapel be shut up, for we only want it open so long as showers of grace continue to descend.

First, here is *sovereign mercy*. Listen to these words; "I will give them the shower in its season." Is it not sovereign, divine mercy, for who can say, "I will give them showers," except God? Can the false prophet who walks amongst the unenlightened heathen? He says he is a rainmaker and can give them showers, but can he do it? Is there an imperial monarch, or the most learned man on earth, who can say, "I will give them the showers in their season?" No. There is only one wherein all the clouds are held. There is only one hand in which all the channels of the mighty ocean above the firmament are contained. There is only one voice that can speak to the clouds and bid them beget the rain. "Out of whose womb came the ice? and the hoary frost of heaven, who has gendered it?" "Who sends down the rain upon the earth? Who scatters the showers upon the green herb? Do not I, the LORD?" Who else could do it? Is not rain in God's power? and who could send it except Him? We know that Catholics pretend that they can get grace without getting it from God directly, for they believe that God puts all His grace into the pope and then that runs down into smaller pipes, called cardinals and bishops, through which it runs into the priests. And by turning the tap with a shilling you can get as much "grace" as you like. But it is not so with God's grace. He says, "I will give them showers." Grace is the gift of God and is not to be created by man.

Notice next, it is *needed grace*. "I will give them showers." What would the ground do without showers? You may break the clods, you may sow your seeds, but what can you do without the rain? Ah! you may prepare your barn and sharpen your sickles, but your sickles will be rusted before you have any wheat, unless there are showers. They are needed. So is the divine blessing

***"In vain Apollos sows the seed,
And Paul may plant in vain."***

In vain you come here, in vain you labor, in vain you give your money—

***"Till God the plenteous shower bestows,
And sends salvation down."***

Then, next, it is *plenteous grace*. "I will send them showers." It does not say, "I will send them drops," but "I will send them showers." "It seldom rains but it pours." So it is with grace. If God gives a blessing, He usually gives it in such a measure that there is not room enough to receive it. Where are we going to hold God's blessing that we have already obtained? I told the people on Thursday that God had promised us that if we brought the tithes into the storehouse He would send us such a blessing that we would not have room to hold it. We have tried it, and the promise has been fulfilled, as it always will be as long as we rely upon it. Plenteous grace. Ah! we shall want plenteous grace, my friends. Plenteous grace to keep us humble, plenteous grace to make us prayerful, plenteous grace to make us holy, plenteous grace to make us zealous, plenteous grace to make us truthful, plenteous grace to preserve us through this life and at last, to land us in heaven. We cannot do without showers of grace. How many are there here that have been dry in a shower of grace? Why, there is a shower of divine grace here, but how is it that it does not fall on some of the people? It is because they put up the umbrella of their prejudice.

And though they sit here, even as God's people sit, even when it rains, they have such a prejudice against God's Word, they do not want to hear it. They do not want to love it and it runs off again. Nevertheless, the showers are there and we will thank God for them where they do fall.

Again, it is *seasonable grace*. "I will give them the shower in its season." There is nothing like seasonable grace. There are fruits, you know, that are best in their season and they are not good at any other time. And there are graces that are good in their season, but we do not always require them. A person vexes and irritates me. I want grace just at that moment to be patient. I have not got it and I get angry. Ten minutes after I am ever so patient, but I have not had grace in its season. The promise is, "I will give them the shower in its season." Ah! poor waiting soul, what is your season this morning? Is it the season of drought? Then that is the seasons for showers. Is it a season of great heaviness and black clouds? Then that is the season for showers. What is your season this morning, business man? Lost money all the week, have you? Now is the season to ask for showers. It is nighttime. Now the dew falls. The dew does not fall in the day, it falls in the night, the night of affliction, trial and trouble. There stands the promise—only go and plead it. "I will give them the shower in its season."

We have one more thought and then we have done. Here is a *varied* blessing. "I will give you *showers* of blessing." The word is in the *plural*. All kinds of blessings God will send. The rain is all of one kind when it comes, but grace is not all of one kind or it does not produce the same effect. When God sends rain upon His church, He "sends showers of blessing." There are some ministers who think that if there is a shower on their church, God will send a shower of work. Yes, but if He does, He will send a shower of comfort. Others think that God will send a shower of Gospel truth. Yes, but if He sends that, He will send a shower of Gospel holiness. For all God's blessings go together. They are like the sweet sister graces that danced hand in hand. God sends showers of blessings. If He gives comforting grace, He also gives converting grace. If He makes the trumpet blow for the bankrupt sinner, He will also make it sound a shout of joy for the sinner that is pardoned and forgiven. He will send "showers of blessing."

Now, then, there is a promise in that Bible. We have tried to explain and enlarge upon it. What shall we do with it?

***"In that book there hidden lies
A pearl of price unknown."***

Well, we have examined this rich promise. We as a church are looking at it. We are saying, "Is that ours?" I think most of the members will say, "It is, for God has poured out upon us showers of blessing in their season." Well, then, if the promise is ours, the precept is ours as much as the promise. Ought we not to ask God to continue to make us a blessing? Some say I did so-and-so when I was a young man. But supposing you are fifty, you are not an old man now. Is there not something you can do? It is all very well to talk about what you have done, but what are you doing now? I know what it is with some of you, you shined brightly once, but your candle has not been trimmed lately and so it does not shine so well. May God take away some of the worldly cares and snuff the candles a little! You know there were snuffers and snuffer trays provided in the temple for all the candles, but no extinguishers. And if there should be a poor candle here this morning, with a terrific snuff that has not given alight for a long while, you will have no extinguisher from me, but I hope you will always have a snuffing. I thought the first time when I came to the lamps this morning, it would be to snuff them. That has been the intention of my sermon—to snuff you a little—to set you to work for Jesus Christ.

O Zion, shake yourself from the dust! O Christian, raise yourself from your slumbers! Warrior, put on your armor. Soldier, grasp your sword! The captain sounds the alarm of war. O sluggard! why do you sleep? O heir of heaven, has not Jesus done so much for you that you should live to Him? O beloved brethren, purchased with redeeming mercies, girt about with lovingkindness and with tenderness

“Now for a shout of sacred joy,”

and after that to the battle! The little seed has grown to this, who knows what it shall be? Only let us together strive, without variance. Let us labor for Jesus. Never did men have so fair an opportunity, for the last hundred years, “There is a tide that, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune.” Shall you take it at the flood? Over the bar, at the harbor’s mouth! O ship of heaven, let your sails be out. Let not your canvass be furled and the wind will blow us across the sea of difficulty that lies before us. Oh! that the latter day might have its dawning even in this despised habitation! O my God! From this place cause the first wave to spring which shall move another and then another, till the last great wave shall sweep over the sands of time and dash against the rocks of eternity, echoing as it falls, “Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah! the Lord God Omnipotent reigns!”

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