

The Kind of Worship God Desires, Part 3

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

Code: 90-356

Now I want you to open your Bible for a moment to begin tonight by looking at the text which is the foundation for our study on worship. It's John chapter 4 verses 20 through 24, John chapter 4 verses 20 through 24. This very familiar and wonderful portion of Scripture tells the story of the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman. And in that encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman, our Lord gives us great insight into the theme of worship.

In verse 20, John writes, "Our fathers worshiped in this mountain." These are the words of the Samaritan woman. She's referring to Mount Gerizim where the Samaritans held their worship. She says, "Our fathers worshiped in this mountain, and you people...that is the Jews...say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." She is endeavoring to figure out where is the appropriate place to worship. Is it here in Mount Gerizim, the Samaritan place, or is it Jerusalem, the Jewish place?

To which, Jesus responds. Verse 21, "Jesus said to her, 'Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem shall you worship the Father. You worship that which you do not know. We worship that which we know for salvation is from the Jews. But an hour is coming and now is when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth, for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. God is spirit and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.'"

Our Lord is saying there was a time when a place served as a focal point of worship. There is coming a time when worship will have nothing to do with a place and everything to do with an attitude. Worship in spirit and in truth. There is much in the words of our Lord that begin in verse 21 that helps us to understand worship. And so, we're looking a little bit intently at this portion of Scripture and pulling out the salient elements that relate to worship.

Let's go back to a basic definition just so we don't assume anything. When you say you worship, you simply are saying you give honor to God. It comes from an old English word "worthship" and it was to ascribe to someone value, to ascribe to someone worship. And so when you say you worship God, you are simply saying God is worthy of honor...God is worthy of praise...God is worthy of glory. Worship is giving honor to God. And it is a life-dominating attitude. It is based on truth because how can you give honor to God unless you know God? And the more you know about God, the more you are able to honor Him for who He is. Because God is infinite perfection, you can continue to be exposed to the increasing understanding of His infinite perfection and thus your ability to give Him honor for who He is increases as well.

And it is not simply a matter of song. It is not simply a matter of corporate praise. Giving honor to God is not just saying that He is worthy of honor, but it is living a life that in itself demonstrates that you respect Him. To say, for example, that you worship God and you honor God, and you glorify God and then you disobey Him and you bring reproach on His name and you follow patterns of sin is to

make yourself simply a hypocrite. If you believe that God is worthy of supreme honor and He is, if you believe that God is the one to be honored above all, then that will of necessity demand that you live a life that brings honor to God.

So when we're talking about worship, we're not talking simply about an expression in a song, or a corporate worship, we're talking about personal commitment to give honor to God all the time everywhere in every circumstance, which then calls us to always do that which we know honors God. True worship is a life. It is not something that happens on Sunday. This is merely a verbal expression of a true worshipping heart.

The music is how you find words and how your emotions are released in a wondrous God-designed form so that the joy that you feel as you worship God can be expressed. But the worship is deeper than the verbal expression. The worship informs and motivates that verbal expression. But when we say we offer to God worship, we are simply saying we not only with our mouths but with our lives do everything to honor the One who is worthy of all honor. It is giving to God honor.

Now we started with a kind of obvious beginning, talking first of all about the importance of worship...the importance of worship. And I'll draw you back to our text for a moment. How important is worship? Go to verse 23. There it says, at the end of verse 23, "The Father seeks worshipers....the Father seeks worshipers."

How important is worship? It's very important, it is what God is doing redemptively. God is seeking worshipers. And the seeking here is what theologians would call efficacious seeking. That it is not some kind of random hope-so kind of seeking, but an effectual seeking that brings about a real salvation. You could parallel this with John 6. "No man comes to Me except the Father draw him." It is the same as the Father drawing. The Father seeking is an effectual seeking, it is an effective seeking, it is a saving seeking. It is the Father drawing the soul to Christ.

And what is the Father doing in that? He is drawing a worshiper. He's seeking true worshipers. In other words, the point of redemption is that we become true worshipers, that we live lives totally and utterly devoted to the worship of God in the fullness of His trinitarian person. This then is our priority and will be our priority forever and ever in heaven, where our worship will be made perfect. Whether we hear the Apostle Paul say, "Present your bodies a living sacrifice as an act of spiritual worship," or we hear Peter say that, "You are a spiritual priesthood offering up spiritual sacrifices to God as an act of worship," it is the same thing. We have been saved to become worshipers. And Jonathan was saying a few minutes ago that I have been controversial through the years, more so outside the church than inside the church. I know I'm not controversial here because I've been teaching here long enough and we all understand what the Word of God teaches.

But one of the things that he mentioned, The Gospel According to Jesus, was the most controversial book I ever wrote. And all I was saying in that book was one simple truth, Jesus is Lord. Why would that cause controversy among evangelicals? I was simply saying that when you become a Christian, you submit yourself to the sovereign lordship of Jesus Christ, you become a slave of Christ, and the rest of your life you do what He wills you to do, you do what honors Him. And what honors Him is obedience. That was controversial. That was monumentally controversial. In fact, that was so controversial, I think I wrote that book, I can't remember when I wrote it, but many years ago, 20 years ago, I think, because this new one is the twentieth anniversary. It's still in print and it's still controversial. All I was saying is when you become a believer, it is not that all of a sudden you have now taken Jesus into your life so that He can wave His magic wand and give you all you want, you

have now identified Jesus as Lord and you are His slave and the rest of your life you're going to do what He wants you to do because you love Him and honor Him and you know He is worthy of your complete obedience. That's simply Christianity. The Father seeks true worshipers. Those who ascribe to Him honor as a way of life. That's how important it is. It is the absolute priority. And then secondly, we kind of expanded that thought a little bit, and we talked about the source of worship. And at this point, I go back to the same statement. The Father seeks true worshipers. God not only has in mind that we would be true worshipers, but He effects that...He is the source. We are redeemed by His power so that we become true worshipers.

What I'm getting at in that sense is that if someone doesn't acknowledge the lordship of Christ though they say they might believe in Jesus, if someone isn't lost, to borrow the hymn, in wonder, love and praise, if someone isn't consumed with the privilege of being a slave of Jesus Christ who is Lord, if someone isn't totally devoted to worshiping the Lord, to worshiping God in His trinitarian fullness, then you could ask the legitimate question...is that person one whom the Father has truly sought? You have all kinds of people who talk about Jesus, but you have far less who live lives devoted to His honor. True worshipers are those who have been transformed by the sovereign power of God into those who worship, Philippians 3:3, in the spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh.

What happens when you become a Christian is, you can't run fast enough from all your fleshly desires. You leave them all behind. That's again that great statement which is repeated throughout the gospels, "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow Me." That's a true worshiper. True worship is defined by obedience and praise is simply the overflow of that loving heart consumed with the desire to obey and honor the Lord. We are made worshipers.

You don't have to artificially generate it. It's the most consistent thing that a believer does, is worship. All you need to do is inform it...inform it. That's why we teach the Word of God. And I told you a few weeks ago that I was asked early in the ministry here, "How in the world can your people worship when you give these long sermons? Take up all the time preaching?" And my response was, "How in the world could anybody worship if you didn't know the truth about God? And the more you know, the more informed your worship is, the more informed your worship is, the more you are a true worshiper."

Then we considered thirdly the object of worship...the object of worship. And these are obvious things, but just to focus on them in this text. Who is the object of worship? Verse 21 ends up with, "Worship the Father." Verse 23 says, "Worship the Father." Verse 24 says, "God is spirit and those who worship Him..." We are to worship the one who is spirit and the one who is Father. Okay? Those are very important ideas. We are to worship the God who is spirit and the God who is Father.

Now this is where we left off last time. I talked, first of all, about God who is spirit, that is His essential nature. He's not an idol. He's not a statue. He's not confined to a building. He's not confined to a place, a mountain, to a location, to a city. He is omnipresent, that means He is alive everywhere at all times. He is eternal, transcends time, no beginning and no ending. He is ever and always alive, a living spirit to be worshiped at all times and all places, never confined to any location or to any form.

Even in the Old Testament, the tabernacle and the temple were not the places that confined God or even contained God. They were symbols of His eternal and limitless presence. God is spirit and God is eternal and infinite spirit. He is at all times everywhere in the universe and He is to be worshiped at

all times and everywhere by those who have been sought as true worshipers.

In Acts 7:48, these words are familiar to us, "The Most High does not dwell in that which is made by hands." That's against the background of idolatry, and of all the temples in the world that are supposedly the houses of God's. He is that eternal living spirit who is to be worshiped at all times in all places by those who belong to Him.

But there's more to this than just saying "worship the God who is spirit." Let me take you a little further into that. What is the defining characteristic of this God who is spirit? It is not just that He is limitless, it is not just that He is eternal, it is not just that He is immutable, or unchanging, it is not just that He is omnipresent, all places at all times. What is His essential nature?

And I think to understand that, we need only to be reminded that we are called in the Old Testament to worship God in fear...to worship God in fear. When we worship God at all times in all places, because God is always available to the true worshiper, wherever that true worshiper is, we also need to understand that when we come to God, there is a foundational reality about Him that is to be understood. And here it comes from Psalm 96:9, "Worship the Lord in holy array, tremble before Him, all the earth." Worship the Lord in holy array. Tremble before Him, all the earth.

To whom does the Lord look? To whom does He look? "To this one I will look." Isaiah 66:2, "To him who is humble, contrite of spirit, who trembles at My Word."

Where does this fear come from? This fear comes from the fact that God is holy. Turn, for a moment, in your Bible to that wonderful sixth chapter of Isaiah. And this is a monumental portion of Scripture upon which I have preached a thousand times, probably, through the years. And I love it greatly. But it takes us, in a sense, to the essential attribute of God that relates to us worshiping in holy array, worshiping with fear. And that is God's holiness.

"In the year of King Uzziah's death, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne lofty and exalted, the train of His robe filling the temple. Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings; with two He covered His face, with two He covered His feet, with two He flew. And one called out to another and said, 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of host, the whole earth is full of His glory.' And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of Him who called out while the temple was filling with smoke."

Here is the prophet Isaiah who has a vision of God and he sees God high and lifted up in majesty and glory on His throne. And the defining characteristic of God is thrice repeated by the antiphonal angels that are hovering in His presence, "Holy, holy, holy," back and forth they say. And His holiness is a threat to a fallen world and so it shakes the very threshold, the foundation of the temple. And the temple fills with smoke because our God is a consuming fire. And in that vision, Isaiah is literally devastated and he says in verse 4, "Woe is me." He pronounces a curse on himself. He pronounces damnation on himself, judgment on himself. "For I am ruined." Literally in the Hebrew, "I am disintegrating, I am crumbling into pieces." He sees a vision of the holiness of God. And it is a devastating experience for him. It results in a fear, it results in a kind of dread, or a kind of horror. It results in a literal disintegration of his own mind. He begins to crumble, fall apart under the power of the vision of holiness. And what is causing him to crumble is he is fully aware of his own sinfulness and it's a melt down, it's a total melt down. He said, "I'm ruined...I'm ruined. I've seen God and I've seen holiness. And if I've seen God, God has seen me. And if He sees me, He sees sin. I am

undone.”

Why? “Because I am a man of unclean lips.” Why does he say that? Because depravity shows itself most readily by our mouths. It’s our speech that betrays our fallenness most often. Long before your deeds will betray your fallenness, your mouth will betray it. And he knew it.

Not only that, “I live among a people of unclean lips.” Somebody might say, “Why are you saying this, Isaiah, you’re a prophet of God?” And he would answer, “For my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of host. I have seen God in His holiness on display. I am destroyed.” That’s the essence of a vision that produces worship.

It’s one thing to say God is spirit. It’s something else to say God is spirit but God is holy, holy, holy. The true worshiper goes to worship in holy attire out of sense of fear. How many times in the Old Testament are we instructed to fear the Lord? Holiness inspires fear because we realize our sinfulness. It results in brokenness. It results in trembling at the Word of God, as we saw in Isaiah 66. True worship rises out of that context. It is essential if you’re going to be a true worshiper to have a vision of the true God, the God who is spirit but the God who is spirit who is holy, holy, holy. And I believe the true worshiper starts with an awareness of the awesome holiness of God and his own utter unholiness.

This is not something that was only experienced by Isaiah. Abraham, Genesis 18:27, confessed that he was nothing but dust and ashes before God. Job in Job 42:5 and 6 said, “I repent in dust and ashes,” when he had a real vision of God. Manoah, the father of Samson, came home after he had seen a vision of God and said to his wife, “We shall surely die,” Judges 13. Why? “Because I saw God and if I saw God, He saw me. I saw holiness, He saw sin. We’re dead.” That’s the vision.

This is the vision that rose out of the heart of Ezra. Turn to Ezra chapter 9, Ezra, the student of Scripture, is stunned by the sins of his own people. And in Ezra 9 and verse 3, he shows himself in the throes of remorse. “I tore my garment, my robe, pulled some of the hair from my head and my beard, sat down appalled. Then everyone who trembled at the words of the God of Israel on account of the unfaithfulness of the exiles gathered to me and I sat appalled until the evening offering.” Just literally distraught over the sinfulness of the people of God.

And in verse 5 he launches into a prayer. “At the evening offering I arose from my humiliation, even with my garment and my robe torn, and I fell on my knees and I stretched out my hands to the Lord my God, and I said, ‘O, my God, I am ashamed and embarrassed to lift up my face to Thee. My God.’” Now remember, like Isaiah, we’re talking about the best man. Isaiah was the best prophet, the leading prophet. Ezra is the great spiritual teacher of the Jewish population. And yet, in the presence of God he is overwrought with his own wretchedness.

This is the thing that I think is so utterly missing in what poses today as worship. So much of what I see and hear as worship music, is anything but. The words might say things that are true. But there’s a frivolousness, there is a superficiality, there’s a shallowness in the attitude of those who are participating in it that betrays that this is not true worship. Where is the trembling at the words of the God of Israel? Where is the humiliation? Where is the shame and embarrassment? In verse 6 he says, “For our iniquities have risen above our heads and our guilt has grown even to the heavens. Since the days of our fathers to this day we’ve been in great guilt and account of our iniquities we are kings and our priests have been given into the hand of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity, to plunder, to open shame as it is this day.” And he goes through the history of the tragedy

of Israel. "But now for a brief moment, grace has been shown from the Lord our God, to leave us an escaped remnant and to give us a peg in His holy place...amazing language...just to give us one little place that we can hold on to in His holy presence. For we are slaves...verse 9...yet in our bondage our God has not forsaken us, but has extended loving kindness to us." Verse 10 he says, "And we have forsaken Thy commandments."

Over in verse 13, he says, "And after all that has come upon us for our evil deeds and our great guilt since Thou, our God, has requited us less than our iniquities deserve and has given us an escaped remnant as this, You let us come out of captivity, You've given us our life back and our nation back and we don't deserve it." This is the posture of true brokenness that worships before a holy God.

And verse 14, "Shall we again break Your commandments and intermarry with the peoples who commit these abominations? Wouldst Thou not be angry with us to the point of destruction, until there is no remnant nor any who escape? O Lord God of Israel, Thou art righteous." And one more comment at the end of verse 15 about our guilt and how no one can stand before Thee because of this.

Where is this in our worship? Where is this overwhelming sense of our sinfulness? Yes our sins are forgiven. Yes they're removed by the blood of Christ. But they still should be the horrible reality and the profound burden that makes us worship in humility and brokenness.

Turn to Daniel 9, here's another one of the, I think, the two favorite prayers of mine in the Old Testament, Ezra's in chapter 9, and Daniel's in chapter 9. Daniel praying also with the whole nation in mind, in verse 4, "I prayed to the Lord my God and confessed and said, 'Alas, O Lord, the great and awesome God.'" Can I remind you that the language here lifts up God? This is not the language of Jesus is my buddy and God is my pal. This is a very, very different understanding. "Alas, O Lord, the great and awesome God who keeps His covenant and loving kindness for those who love Him and keep His commandment. We have sinned, committed iniquity, acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from Your commandments and ordinances, moreover we've not listened to Your servants, the prophets, who spoke in Your name to our kings, our princes, our fathers, the people of this land. Righteousness belongs to Thee, O Lord, but to us open shame." And it goes on.

Verse 8, "Open shame belongs to us." Verse 9, "We have rebelled." Verse 10, "Nor have we obeyed the voice of the Lord." And so it goes.

I really think what Christians need is a vision of the holiness of God. It was Habakkuk, you remember in Habakkuk 3:16, that trembled at the voice of the Holy One. The restored remnant feared the Lord when they heard His holy Word spoken by Haggai, the prophet, chapter 1 verse 12. And, you know, even when you come in to the New Testament, God incarnate in Jesus Christ was a frightening, frightening person...truly. When on the Mount of Transfiguration Jesus pulled His flesh aside and revealed His manifest divine blazing glory, Peter, James and John who were there were literally scared into a coma. They fell over like dead people, like Ezekiel did when he had a vision of God, like Isaiah did in the sheer fear of being a sinner exposed to holy God.

Perhaps in less dramatic in some ways revelation, you remember that the disciples out on the Sea of Galilee, a storm came up and it says they were afraid, Jesus stilled the storm and it says they were exceedingly afraid. It is more frightening to have God in the boat than a storm outside the boat. They

knew who was in their boat, they were exposed. They knew they were in the presence of the Creator who controls the wind and the waves and they were terrified. And they should have been terrified. It's a terrifying thing to be in the presence of absolute holiness when you are a wretched sinner.

Peter was fishing, Luke 5, couldn't catch anything. "The Lord said to him, 'Put out into the deep water, let down your nets for a catch.' Simon said, 'Look, Master, we worked all night, caught nothing. Do You think we did that on one side of the boat? What do You mean put out your nets for a catch, You think we missed something out there?' But they obeyed." And you remember what happened. They had so many fish they filled both boats and both boats started to sink. "And then Simon Peter fell at Jesus feet." This is what he said, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." Why did he say that? Next verse, "For amazement had seized him."

Trauma had seized him. He was panicked because he was in the presence of the one who controlled fish. And Jesus did this in His miracles to traumatize people. His authority was so apparent, it says, the people were astonished at His teaching. His words were so absolutely mesmerizing that they said, "Never a man spoke like this man." His works were so undeniably divine that the blind man said, "Why here is a marvelous thing, that you know not where He is and yet He's opened my eyes. If this man were not from God, He couldn't do this."

His purity was undeniable. He said, "Which of you convicts Me of sin? And there was no answer." His truthfulness was unquestionable, "If I say the truth, why do you not believe Me?," He said. His power fascinated them. "What kind of man is this," they said in Luke 8, "He commands the winds and the water and they obey Him?" And when the multitudes saw Him heal the paralytic in Matthew 9, they marveled and glorified God who had given such power. They were stunned at His dominance of the demons. The multitudes marveled saying, "They had never seen anything like it," when He cast out the demons in Matthew 9. When He came to a fig tree and it died in His presence, Matthew 21, they marveled. When He stood before Pilate silent, showing no fear, giving no defense, the governor himself marveled. His teaching was so beyond anything they had ever heard, John 7:15 says, "The Jews marveled, saying, 'How does this man know this, never having learned?'"

The person of Jesus Christ, everywhere He went, was the likes of which no one had ever seen or heard. It was stunning, traumatizing, frightening and still there was no real true worship. There was no fear of God before their eyes, to borrow the language of Paul. But He put Himself on display. For those who believed, their fear, their wonder, their marvel turned to faith and turned to love.

We need to understand the holiness of Christ and the holiness of God. We need to understand the fear of the Lord that they need to be viewed with wonder and awe. We lose that. We need to remember that God killed Nadab and Abihu for offering strange fire, that the ground opened and swallowed Korah, Dathan and Abiram. That God killed Uzzah for reaching out with his hand and touching the Ark of the Covenant. That God killed Uzziah the king, we read about in Isaiah 6 cause he stepped over the boundary line. That God slew 40 young men who yelled, "Bald head, bald head," and mocked the prophet. We need to remember that God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, that God destroyed Chorazin and Bethsaida in the New Testament. We need to remember that God killed Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5 when they lied to the Holy Spirit in front of the church. We need to remember that the Apostle Paul said there are some in the church at Corinth who have died because they desecrated the Lord's table. We're dealing with our awesome God. He turned Lot's wife into a pillar of salt. He sent serpents to bite the disobedient Israelites. This is our holy God.

But beyond that, and this is the way to understand it, He displayed mercy. The question in the Old Testament that I'm often asked is, "Why is God so cruel?" That's not the question. The question is, "Why is God so merciful?" Everybody deserves that death. Everybody deserves divine punishment instantaneously and immediately. But it doesn't come. The question in the Old Testament is, "How could God be so patient, so merciful through all of that?" The answer, of course, is Paul's words, "He is by nature a Savior." But from time to time, God does these devastating acts of holy judgment to remind us of what we all deserve. But sinners get used to mercy.

I read an article about a guy who said he's a journalist. He vacillated between being an agnostic and an atheist and an agnostic and an atheist. He and his wife had no room in their lives for God. This is a life of blasphemy. This is a life of rejection of Christ. This is a life that has violated the law of God at its first commandment, and that is to worship God and Him alone. This is a life that would have every reason to be snuffed out and yet he goes on and he flourishes and he succeeds and he advocates his viewpoint. Sinners get used to mercy. And so when God acts in judgment, they're offended by it.

You remember in Luke 13 the story there, don't you?, how we mentioned it this morning how Pilate's men came in and sliced up some worshipers and the following story about how a tower in Siloam fell and killed people. And they asked the question, "Why did that happen?" And the Lord's answer is, "You better repent or you're going to perish also." Ultimately all sinners perish. The general perspective though is that God is merciful and patient, as Romans 2:4 says, the kindness and forbearance of God. But we need to understand that God is a holy God.

And even those of us who have come to salvation must understand His holiness. We worship God in the beauty of holiness and with fear. Hebrews 12:28 says, "Worship God acceptably." What is that? "With reverence and godly fear." I am grieved, wounded by the superficial kind of worship of our great, glorious, holy, merciful God.

Well, worshiping the God who is spirit and the God who is holy is where worship starts. And that is why in our worship on the Lord's day morning when we come together, we sing hymns about God. The choir sings anthems about God. We extol God. We celebrate His glory and His holiness cause that's the foundation. Worshiping God who is spirit but the God who is holy and worshiping Him in fear.

Secondly, and I'm just going to introduce this because I've kept you long this morning, we'll let you out early tonight. But in John 4, again and this is for next Sunday night, this is one of my favorite subjects in the whole Bible. We not only worship God who is spirit, but we worship the Father, verse 21, verse 23. God is spirit and those who worship Him, that takes care of worshiping the God who is spirit, but the God who is Father. The concept of God as Father, God as spirit who is holy, God as Father...this is a glorious truth and I'm going to just give you one hint. It's not talking about worshiping God as your Father. That comes later. It's talking about worshiping the God who is the Father in the essential nature of the Trinity. And we're going to dig into this incredible trinitarian theology. The idea is not foremost, is not...the foremost idea is not that He is our Father, although He is and we'll talk about that. The idea is that He is the Father in the Trinity where there is the Son and the Holy Spirit. We're going to see that God must be worshiped not only as the eternal, omnipresent spirit, the eternal, omnipresent spirit who is absolutely perfectly holy, but He is the God who is a Trinity...a Trinity. He is in trinitarian relationship. This is the essence of His nature. And so next time, we'll look a little more deeply into the nature of God. As I said, you don't want to miss this next week.

Father, we thank You tonight for a wonderful, wonderful day of worship and lifting up our hearts in corporate expression and corporate praise and gratitude for all that You are to us. We want, Lord, that our Sunday celebration, our Sunday song and hymns, praise would not be the sum and substance of all there is in our worship, but merely the overflow, that if we really acknowledge Your worth, Your supreme and ultimate, unequaled paralleled, unfathomable, incomprehensible glories, we would honor You at all times in all ways by commitment to obedience in everything. Lord, may we do what we know pleases You. If we really honor You and value You, we will do what pleases You, what brings You honor and brings You glory because You are THE ultimate worthy One. Teach us how to worship in that way and then make our expressions of song the overflow of our hearts. And we'll thank You in Your Son's name. Amen.

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