



## A Great Chasm Has Been Fixed

### Luke Series #42

Luke 16:19-31

David Sunday

November 3, 2013

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So, when our days are through  
Our hope will rest in You  
For we can trust  
Your promises are true  
  
Our only hope  
Our only hope is You, Lord

[Our Only Hope Is You by Sovereign Grace Music]

My dear church, those words are so true. We can't speak them enough. Our only hope is in the Lord of our salvation. Someone has said that every moment of our lives is charged and loaded with the gravity of eternity. There's just a thin line—a thin veil—between this life and the next, and our only hope is in the Lord, our salvation. The Lord Jesus Christ, our righteousness.

The text of Scripture that we're going to turn to now is in Luke 16. This text is designed to arrest our attention and cause us to ponder the reality of eternity, as is all the Bible. The entire Bible is designed to prepare us to put our trust and hope in God for this life and for the life to come. But this one is especially solemn and especially searching; it will be vital for us to approach it with reverence and with a heart attitude as Isaiah describes: one who is humble and contrite in heart and who trembles at the Word of God (Isaiah 57:15). So let's pray for that now as we prepare to read God's Word together.

Heavenly Father, You are eternal, and we will face You in eternity at the judgment one day. Our fate will be sealed forever, either bliss in Your presence—joy forevermore at Your right hand—or everlasting separation from You. So God, we pray that as we approach Your Word, You—the High and Holy One Who inhabits eternity—would be pleased to draw near to us, to dwell amongst us, to come near to our hearts in powerfully speaking the message of Your Word. We ask that You would give us humble and contrite hearts that tremble at Your Word. You come to revive the spirit of the lowly and revive the heart of the contrite. May You find true contrition, true humility as we bow in reverence before You now, as we listen to Your Son, our Savior, speak the living and abiding Word of God to us. We pray in His name. Amen.

Luke 16:19-31:

*“There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores. The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried, and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. And he called out, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.’ But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.’ And he said, ‘Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house—for I have five brothers—so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.’ But Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.’ And he said, ‘No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ He said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.’”*

A number of years ago, one of the great princesses of the British realm came out of a great cathedral service in England and asked the dean of the cathedral, “Is it true, Dean, that there is a place called hell?” To which the dean replied, “Madame, the Scriptures say so, Christian people have always believed so, and the Church of England confesses so.” To which she responded, “Then, in God's name, why do you not tell us so?”

Why? We're embarrassed. We're embarrassed of a doctrine about hell that is so unpopular; that causes scorn to rise in people when they consider the truths that we profess to believe. We're embarrassed of what the Scriptures say. We're embarrassed of what Christian people have always believed. We're embarrassed, sometimes, of what our own church's confession states.

But Jesus was not embarrassed. Jesus, the greatest Evangelist Who ever lived—the One Who came to seek and save the lost, the One Who, right now at this point in Luke's Gospel, is on the road to Jerusalem to die on a cross to save us, to rescue us from hell—is not embarrassed to talk about what He came to rescue us from. In fact, we learn more about hell from the mouth of Jesus than from anyone else in all the Scriptures.

Jesus came so that we can escape from this dreadful reality called “hell.” But we cannot evade the reality. We cannot deny the existence of hell. And if we try to deny that hell exists, then we must deny that Christ Himself is the Way, the Truth and the Life (John 14:6). He is confronting the Pharisees

in this chapter. He's told them in verse 13, "You cannot serve two masters. You cannot serve God and money. You cannot live for the things of this life and then go live with God forever."

But the Pharisees, we read in verse 14, were lovers of money. They had their hearts set on things below, and they did not have their hearts set on the Kingdom of heaven. So even though the King of kings was standing right there in their presence, they did not press in to His Kingdom.

We saw in verse 16 that that is what Jesus is urging us to do—to press in to His Kingdom. But because the Pharisees have this love of money, it's like the gravity of hell is pulling them downward. They're sinking into judgment. So Jesus tells them this most searching parable to warn them before it's too late; to plead with them to flee from the wrath that is to come. He doesn't hide the reality of judgment that's facing them if they do not repent.

## Two Men, Two Destinies

This parable is just as instructive for us today. It's as simple as it's clear. There are two men and there are two destinies. Let's look at the two men together.

### A Rich Man

The first is in verse 19: "*There was a rich man...*" That's troubling if the only thing they can say about you when you die is, "He was a rich man." If that's what defines your life, what does that say about your character?

He was a rich man. He was "*clothed in purple (the color of royalty) and fine linen...*" so not just his outer garments were rich but his undergarments were rich as well. He "*feasted sumptuously every day...*" He was making merry. It's the same word that was used of the party that the father threw for his returning son in Luke 15. They were making merry; there was a great celebration.

That was his life. Life was a party for him. Material prosperity was oozing out of him. If he lived today in Chicago, this is a man who would live in the finest penthouse on the Magnificent Mile. He would take his breakfast at the Drake Hotel, then go to lunch at The Cheesecake Factory just to be a little more modest. Then he would have dessert at Ghirardelli's. He would dinner at The Signature Room on top of the Hancock Building. He would buy his suits from Nordstrom's, his ties from Bloomingdale's, and his shoes from Allen Edmonds.

He was amazingly gifted and he took these gifts from God but ignored the Giver. He lived as if he would live forever.

Do you ever think to yourself, “If I were a rich man, what would I do?” This is more than just a cute song for the Pharisees. This is what they set their heart on. They loved riches. They were trapped trying to serve God and money. But Jesus is warning them, “It’s impossible.”

### **A Poor Man**

Verse 20: At this rich man’s “*gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus...*” Day after day, they would carry him there and drop him off at the gate of this man’s house. He was covered, too. Not with purple or fine linens but with weeping sores that carried such a stench that the wild “*dogs came and licked his sores.*” They beat him to the leftovers from the rich man’s table. . He’s right there by the gate. You couldn’t miss him.

But the rich man turned a blind eye and a deaf ear to this man’s plight. Now, I’m sure he was a good rich man. I’m sure he had set up online bill pay to give a donation to charity every month, having his checks go here and there and everywhere. But he never wanted to come face-to-face with human misery. He didn’t want to look at the poor man right outside his gate. I imagine him shutting the blinds of his windows so that he never had to encounter misery or need. It would remind him too much of his own mortality.

Rick Palmer told me a story about a church that he and Carolyn attended awhile back. The pastor hired someone to dress up like a homeless man and show up in one of their services. He looked like a homeless man; he smelled like a homeless man. Rick and Carolyn were there and said it was very interesting and heart-searching to see how fellow Christians reacted to the presence of this poor man in their midst.

You look at these two guys and ask yourself, “Who would I rather be?” Well, that’s a no-brainer. There’s one thing—only one thing—that the poor man had in this story that the rich man didn’t, and we see it in verse 20. Look at that carefully. What did the poor man have that the rich man didn’t have? Do you see it? A name. He had a name. This is the only parable in which Jesus gives a character a name: Lazarus. Now that’s significant.

St. Augustine said:

“The rich man’s name was thrown around, but God kept quiet about it. The other’s name was lost in silence, and God spoke it... You see, God who lives in heaven kept quiet about the rich man’s name because he did not find it written in heaven. He spoke the poor man’s name, because he found it written there; indeed, he gave instructions for it to be written there.”

That brings us back to Luke 10:20: “*...rejoice that your names are written in heaven!*” Rejoice if that’s true of you! His name is Lazarus. In Hebrew, it’s Eleazar: “He whom God helps.” He owned

nothing in this life, but he's known by God. He's helped by God. He experiences the mercy of God in his life. He doesn't blame God for his misery, as many poor people do. He trusts in God. He looks up to God from the gutter and says, "Lord, You are my keeper. You are my Helper. I trust in You. I need You, Lord."

Ask yourself again, "Who would I rather be? A rich man whose name is known on earth? Or a poor man whose name is known by God?" Two men. Rich. Poor. And they have two destinies.

## **Two Destinies**

Now, there are a couple things that both of them have in common.

They both die. You've heard the saying, "There are two things we can't avoid: death and taxes." Some people do manage to avoid taxes, but the statistics on death are impressive. You can't avoid it. Young and old, rich and poor, good and bad, educated and ignorant, religious and agnostic, godly and godless, none of us can avoid death.

Psalm 103:15-16 says, "*As for man, his days are like grass; he flourishes like a flower of the field; for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more.*"

There's going to come a day when, among all those who have known you in this world, your name is going to be mentioned. They're going say, "Have you heard the news? He's dead." "She's dead." They will say that of you. Are you ready for that day?

We can't avoid it. We can't deny it. How kind of God in His providence that, right now in this season in our church, the adult Sunday school is on ending life well. God wants us to face and come to terms with our own mortality; to remember that we too shall die.

This past Sunday, Ross Stern taught the adult Sunday school class. It was recorded and posted on our website. I urge every single member of our church to listen to that talk. You might even put all your devotions on hold this week and just listen to that talk and meditate on those words. Courageous, compassionate, clear, compelling, hope-filled instruction from our dear brother, who right now has stage four cancer and whose wife is being told by her doctors that it won't be long before she is with the Lord. Our hearts break over this, and we feel the weight. But God is bringing us as a church through a season together; we need to walk this path with Ross and Jan, and we are going to learn from this together.

God has things that He wants to do in our church. He wants to reorient our priorities. He wants to help us set our hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God (Colossians 3:1; Hebrews 12:2). Ross and Jan are examples to us in this. They're showing us what that looks like. I want you to hear what Ross said last week. Take time to listen to that talk; it will speak deeply to you.

The second thing we see that these two men have in common is that death is just the beginning. You know, in most stories, people die at the end of the story and that's all there is. What more can we say? But here Jesus has the two men dying at the beginning of the story, and the rest of the story is about what happens after they die. Their life after death seems more real and more consequential than what happened before they died.

Hebrews 9:27 says, "...it is appointed unto man once to die and after that..." This is about the "after that." What comes after that? Judgment. Jesus is saying, "Don't focus so much on the little dot that is your life. Focus on the line that goes forward into all eternity. The way you live right now, the decisions you make right now and the way you respond to God's Word right now is setting the trajectory for eternity. Eternity is what matters, what's significant."

The poor man's destiny is in verse 22 and this is where their paths start to really diverge. The poor man died, it says. There's no funeral for him; no mention of a burial. But the pallbearers are awesome—he "...was carried by the angels..." And the destination makes up for all the difficulties that he fell into on earth. He's carried by the angels to Abraham's side where he experiences sweet fellowship with the saints and basks in the glory of the magnificence of God's merciful presence for the rest of eternity.

When [he's] been there ten thousand years,  
Bright shining as the sun,  
[he'll] have no less days to sing God's praise  
than when [he] first begun.

(Adapted from Amazing Grace by John Newton, 1779)

That's this poor man's destiny: glory. God speaks so tenderly of the death of His saints. He says in Psalm 116:15, "*Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints.*"

He sends the fairest beings in heaven to come and usher His people into His glorious presence. His angels came and carried Lazarus—he whom God helps, he whom God has mercy.

Psalm 17:15 says, "...when I awake, I shall be satisfied with your likeness." Lazarus woke up! Dogs weren't licking his sores anymore. His eyes beheld the One in Whom he trusted all his days! It's beautiful that the destiny of Lazarus makes all the trials he endured on earth seem light and momentary compared to the glory that's now being revealed.

Think often of heaven, saints of God. Think often of where the angels are carrying you and of the joy and bliss you will experience in the presence of God. That's the believer's destiny.

Then in the second part of verse 22, we read of the rich man's destiny. "*The rich man also died...*" You can imagine him getting sick but he's so rich that they call all the physicians, "Is there anything that can be done to help him?" Consider these Old Testament verses:

- Proverbs 11:4 says, “*Riches do not profit in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death.*”
- Ecclesiastes 8:8: “*No man has the power to retain the spirit, or power over the day of death...*”
- Psalm 89:48: “*What man can live and never see death? Who can deliver his soul from the power of Sheol?*”

So that the time comes when the rich dies. His friends gather. There’s a eulogy. They say wonderful things about him. There’s a burial. They probably order a monument. And as they walk away from his funeral, they’re looking at one another saying, “At least he’s in a better place.”

But Jesus shocks us with the very next words, “... *and in Hades, being in torment...*” Hades, the realm of the dead before they face God in the final judgment. In the New Testament, no believer is ever spoken of as going to Hades. This man has crossed the great chasm, and entered into eternal judgment.

Now, who would you rather be? Most people think all that’s needed to go to heaven when you die is just to die. We think it’s the default destination.

The Des Moines Register did a poll awhile back of people in Iowa and Minnesota—good, Midwestern people. Most of them said they believed in heaven and hell. But then they asked, “Can you think of anyone you know who might end up in hell?” Only about 20% of the people said, “Yes.” Then they asked, “On a personal basis, where do you think you might end up—in heaven or hell?” Less than 5% of the people believed there was any danger of them ending up in hell.

The testimony of Scripture is that heaven is not our default destination. Heaven is not what we deserve. It is only for those who experience God’s grace reaching down and bringing us to faith in Christ Jesus. Only through the salvation that’s in Christ can we go to heaven when we die, otherwise, what we’ve earned is a one-way ticket to hell with no return.

Jesus wants the Pharisees to take this very personally. He wants them, as He’s telling this story, to look at Him and say, “Are you suggesting that this could be us? That we could end up there?” Yes! Jesus is telling them this so they will flee from the wrath that is to come; so they will look to Him as the Savior of the world, the King of kings, Who came to rescue them. And they will press in to His Kingdom and put their trust and hope in Him. He’s telling them this because He has mercy on their souls.

You’ve heard it said that hell is nothing more than truth learned too late. One day everyone’s going to be a believer. One day every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. There will be no agnostics in hell. There will be no atheists in hell. Everyone in hell will believe the truth about Who Jesus is, but it will be too late. And it won’t be a belief that results in salvation.

## The Dreadful Reality of Hell

Hell is a dreadful reality. It's a place of agonizing pain. You see it in the words used in this passage:

- Torment (23, 28)
- Thirst (24)
- Flames (24)
- Anguish (24, 25)
- Great chasm (26)

Notice that the fire does not annihilate. It doesn't just burn up and consume. It's a fire that causes anguish.

Do you say, "Oh, I heard that those were just symbols. No need to fear"? Maybe they are symbols, just like the descriptions of heaven are filled with symbolism. But if you think that's letting you off the hook, think again. What is this on my finger? It's a symbol of my marriage. What's greater: the symbol or the reality that the symbol represents? The reality is greater. The symbol is always less than the reality it represents.

If the biblical descriptions of hell are symbolic, it's only because the terrors and horrors and agonies of hell are so intense that human language cannot begin to describe them. It's worse than what the human tongue can tell:

- *"Where the worm does not die, the fire does not quench"* (Mark 9:48).
- Where there's *"weeping and gnashing of teeth"* (Luke 13:28).

Isaiah 33:14 says of those who comprehend this reality that, *"The sinners in Zion are afraid; trembling has seized the godless: 'Who among us can dwell with the consuming fire? Who among us can dwell with everlasting burnings?'"* That is the only wise response to what Scripture reveals.

Hell is also a place of appalling poverty. In hell, those who did not repent and believe will realize they had everything life could offer, but it was just a loan and now it's demanded back. They will find themselves bereft of all hope. We've heard, I think, in Dante's Inferno: "Abandon all hope, ye who enter here."

The rich man now remembers how this poor man longed to have a crumb from his table but now we hear him pleading in verse 24, *"Father Abraham have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame."*

In verse 25, Abraham says to him, *"Child, remember..."* Someone has said that the hell of hell will be these words: "Son, remember. Remember what you experienced on earth. Remember how you lived in ease. Remember how you breathed in fresh and pleasant air. Remember how you felt the

refreshing light of the sun; how you looked up in the sky in all its blueness and saw the beauty of the heart; how you went out at night and experienced the light of the moon and saw the majesty of all the stars; how you enjoyed peaceful conversation with family and friends and loved ones; how you sat down in quietness to eat and drink; how you could always get something to satisfy your hunger or thirst; and that when you needed rest, you could go home from a long day's labor and be refreshed. Child, remember. Remember how you had all these things? They were all gifts from Me. But in the foolishness—in the stubbornness of your heart—you did not acknowledge Me. You did not give Me thanks. Remember! Remember!”

People who live only for the things of this world will get nothing from heaven in the end. That's why Jesus said in Luke 6:24-25, *“Woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your consolation.”* And in Luke 16:25: *“Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things...”*

What if you could have everything you ever wanted in your life? Every dream you could ever desire in your lifetime Then that would be the end of your good things? Not only does he remember but now he recognizes what he's missing. He looks over and sees Abraham. He sees Lazarus comforted there while he's in anguish. From hell, he looks and sees how the saints in heaven have nothing to fear—no death, no enemies, no trouble, no affliction and nothing to diminish their joy.

Helmut Thielicke, a German theologian of the mid-1900s said:

“To be in hell simply means to be utterly separated from God, but in such a way that one is compelled to see him; that one must see him as a thirsty man sees a silvery spring from which he dare not drink. This is hell: to be forced to see the glory of God and have no access to it... To be compelled to endure that state in which everything is forfeited forever, in which the splendor of the eternal majesty no longer lights and warms but consumes us.”

Verse 26: *“And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed...”* These two men lived right next door to each other but now they live in absolute separation forever.

We see from this that God's mercy is boundless but there is an expiration date. There is a time in which the offer of mercy is no more; where the door to heaven is closed. There is a chasm and when you've crossed to the other side, you can't go back. When you're in that place of eternal torment, there's no exit; there's no way to cross over and it lasts forever. All the roads to hell are one way.

One of the Puritans said, “The damned will live as long in hell as God will live in heaven.” Why? Why is he there? What brought him to this place? The key to the whole parable is in the last few verses, where we start to see what it was about this rich man that causes him to experience God's judgment. Was it because he never gave of his money to the poor? Is that the reason he's in hell? if I just give my money to the poor, will I go to heaven when I die? No, that's not the point of this parable.

The reason this rich man is in hell is because he would not listen to the Word of God. If he had listened to God's Word, yes, his heart would have been transformed. Yes, he would have been generous to the poor. His faith in God would have been reflected in caring, compassion, kindness and goodness to those who are in need all around him. But he didn't hear the Word.

### **Hell is Completely Avoidable**

The main point of this parable that Jesus wants us to get is that hell is completely avoidable. How is it avoidable? Listen to the Word. Listen to what God has revealed of Himself from Genesis to Revelation. The thrust of the Scriptures is to make you wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus (2 Timothy 3:15). It's to show you the Way, the Truth and the Life (John 14:6); for your sins to be forgiven (2 Timothy 3:15); for your conscience to be cleansed (Hebrews 10:19-25); for death to be defeated (1 Corinthians 15:54-46); for you to be the possessor of eternal life (John 3:16). This is what God is driving at, from the beginning of Scripture to the end of Scripture. Are you listening to God's Holy Word?

This man in hell realizes the danger his living brothers are still in so in verse 27, he begs God to send Lazarus to his father's house, so that he might warn the five brothers, "*lest they come into this place of torment.*" And look at what Abraham wisely says in verse 29: "*They have Moses and the Prophets (the Word of God); let them hear them.*" Let them listen to this Word. If they will take it to heart and believe this Bible is sufficient, it is razor-sharp and full of saving power. The question is, will you listen or will you ignore the Rescuer?

No one is in hell due to lack of evidence of the truth. They're in hell because of stubborn refusal to believe the Word of God. The rich man doesn't believe this and he says in verse 30, "No, Father Abraham! Don't tell me that all they need to do is to listen to God's Word! No! That's not enough! They need something more spectacular. If someone rises from the dead and goes to them, then they'll repent. Oh, if only they could see Lazarus now, then they'd repent."

What do you think it takes to convince people of the truth of the gospel? The reality of eternity?

Today, we've got all kinds of books, like 90 Minutes in Heaven—people who've been there and can tell us about it. I've looked up a website called "To Hell and Back," where you can supposedly hear the screams of people in hell. You can even get an email from hell, sent to you and warning of judgment.

I beg you, friends, do not be fooled by that nonsense. Do not be distracted. In the Scriptures, we find the way of life. In the Scriptures is the path to heaven. In the Scriptures is all the truth that God wants us to know. There's more truth and beauty and power here than our hearts can begin to comprehend in a lifetime. Don't be distracted by lesser things. Go to the Word that's been revealed, for this is the way of salvation. This is sufficient.

If we wanted to reach the Fox Valley with the gospel, imagine someone coming to us and saying, “Oh, if you could just announce next week at New Covenant Bible Church you’re going to have a special speaker direct from eternity. One appearance only.” We would put a poster out front and put it on the website: “Guest speaker from heaven to tell us all about it (or from hell).” Wouldn’t that arrest people’s attention? The answer from this passage is “no.”

Verse 31: “*If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets...*” I believe Jesus would add, based on verse 16, “If they do not hear the gospel of the Kingdom, if they do not hear what God has revealed in His Word, neither will they be convinced if someone rises from the dead.”

And someone has: Jesus. He is alive forever! His cross stands at the intersection of your life—at the intersection of heaven and hell. Eternal life and eternal misery. His cross, where the Savior died to redeem you of your sins, stands there beckoning and pleading with you, “Will you repent and believe before it is too late? Before you cross that chasm, from which no one returns? Before the door of mercy is shut and locked forever? Will you believe in Jesus?”

We are, in this story, like the five brothers. We’re still alive. God’s mercy is still open. God’s Word is still speaking. Today is the day of salvation. Today God is extending His mercy to each of us: “Repent and believe the gospel!” Today is the time. Press in. Let nothing stop you from entering into the Kingdom of God through faith in Jesus. Let’s pray.

As we’ve heard the solemn warning of our Savior, I’ve been praying that there would be some in our church today who would recognize how greatly they need to be rescued—rescued from God’s judgment on sin; rescued from an eternity in hell; granted the gift of eternal life. God may be speaking to you right now and stirring in your heart. There’s a battle going on for your soul and the enemy would just love for you to move on to other things and put this off until a better time. But there may not be a better time. Today, God is speaking to you.

If you would like to repent and put your faith in Jesus, you may join me in this simple prayer, praying from your heart. God will hear you. He is merciful to those who will call on Him. If you do pray this from your heart, I would like you to tell someone afterwards, send an email to the church or call us this week and let us know so we can help you learn to be a follower of Jesus.

Let’s pray.

God, my life is a gift from You. All that I have, all that I am, is from You. All that I enjoy in this world is a reflection of Your goodness. But I acknowledge that I have not lived for Your glory. I have not honored You, nor given you thanks. I recognize that I am a sinner. God, I thank You that in Your love and mercy, You sent Your Son into the world not to condemn the world but that, through Jesus, we might be saved.

God, I see that I need this salvation Jesus came to bring. I thank You that He died on the cross for my sins. I thank You that He is alive today and risen from the dead to give me the gift of everlasting life. And I welcome Him. I receive Him as my Lord and my Savior. Please teach me to be a follower of Jesus. Please show me Your ways. Thank You for opening the door of heaven and everlasting life to me. In Jesus's name. Amen.

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*All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.*

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