

## Christ Is Risen, Part 1

Scripture: John 20:1–10

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John, chapter 20. We come in chapter 20 to the resurrection of our Lord Jesus. So everything from here to the end of the gospel of John – just two more chapters – is about the risen Christ, the risen Christ. You need to understand that the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ is not just *a* feature of Christianity, it is *the* main event; it is the main event.

Resurrection is the point of redemption. The whole purpose of God in creating and redeeming His people is to raise them to eternal glory so that they can worship Him forever. That is the point of His redemption – resurrection to eternal glory in not only glorified spirits, but glorified bodies. Our resurrection is secured by the power of God, the power of Christ demonstrated in His resurrection. Because He lives, we will live.

The resurrection is not only a demonstration of power, it is also a validation of His offering, because God was satisfied with the sacrifice Christ offered for the sins of His people. God raised Him from the dead, validating His work on the cross. He said, “It is finished!” God said, “I am satisfied,” raised Him, and He ascended to eternal glory, sat down at the right hand of God to intercede for His people and bring them all into eternal glory spiritually and in resurrected form.

The resurrection then is the greatest event in history - in redemptive history, or in history period. It is the most significant expression of the power of God on behalf of believers. It is the cornerstone of gospel promise. We are saved to be raised from the dead, and into heaven we go forever in that resurrected form. The purpose of salvation, again, is a resurrected people.

Because Christ conquered death, because He conquered sin, we will be raised to dwell with Him forever. How important is this? Romans 10:9-10, “If you confess Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.”

That is necessary for salvation. That’s why the apostle Paul, as I read earlier, in 1 Corinthians 15 says, “It is this truth of the resurrection which you heard, and which you received, and which you believed, and in which you stand.” It is the very essence of the gospel. And to signify that on an ongoing basis, Sunday, the first day of the week, became the day that the church meets to worship. We do not meet on Friday, the day of crucifixion; we meet on Sunday, the day of resurrection. The church has been doing that since it began. Since the apostles on resurrection day, the first day of the week, met with Jesus that evening, the church has always met on the first day of the week to celebrate the resurrection.

All four gospel writers, by the way, record the actual history of the resurrection. The composite of all four is the total story of the resurrection. The composite testimony of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John

is the full, revealed, inspired picture of the resurrection.

Now we talk about the resurrection. We talk about it; we sing about it; we celebrate it. There are several interesting things to note about it. No one saw it. No one saw the resurrection. But it's not an event you need to see. All you need to see is the Person who was dead, and there were many witnesses. And we are witnesses, because Christ lives in us. But no one saw the resurrection, no one.

No Bible writer tries to explain the resurrection - I mean the physiology of it or the pathology of it, because there is no rational explanation. It's not really a problem that the Bible doesn't explain the resurrection, because it is a creative event. It is a supernatural miracle like all the other miracles that our Lord did. You had the entire creation account of the universe in one chapter. The first chapter of Genesis, you go from absolutely nothing to the entire universe coming into existence in six days.

The fact is stated and the results are obvious, but there is no explanation for it given in Scripture as to how it happened. It is a creative miracle. That is why it is folly for scientists to study creation. You can't study creation from a rational, observable, pragmatic, scientific perspective; you can only accept the miraculous declaration that the Creator gave us in Genesis 1. We don't know how any miracle happened as far as the technical aspects of it. We don't know anything about how God did creation; but we know it's here, and He told us He did it in six days. And He is God; we don't question that.

We don't know how any of the miracles of Jesus occurred. There's no way to diagnose them or to understand them humanly. And we have no explanation of the resurrection. No one was there; we don't know how it happened. Doesn't matter how it happened. It happened the way all miracles happened. It happened because God willed it to happen, and by His supernatural power it happened. How it happened doesn't matter; *that* it happened matters. And we really don't need to know how a miracle happened, but there were eyewitnesses. You could know that it happened without knowing how it happened. We don't need to know how the resurrection happened, but we certainly know that it happened.

How do we know that it happened? Oh, there are several lines of evidence given in Scripture. There is the empty tomb - that's a pretty good indication. There is angelic testimony, directly from heaven; and there were eye witnesses. All of that is going to be laid out in the twentieth chapter of John for us. As we come to his account and as we go through this, we'll blend in a little from Matthew, Mark, and Luke at strategic points to help you get a better grip on it.

Now what we are learning - as John gives us the gospel and the story of Christ - is that John wants us to see the glory of Christ, even in His death. And he showed us the glory of Christ, because He showed us that Jesus literally was in charge of His own dying. And then He was in charge of His own burial. And now He is in charge of His own resurrection. This is to demonstrate to us "that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God," so that we might believe that, and by believing "have eternal life in His name."

The Old Testament promised the Messiah would rise. It's promised in Psalm 16: "He will not allow His Holy One to see corruption, but show Him the path of life. He will not corrupt in the grave, yet will through the grave into life." Isaiah 53: "He will be cut off," but He will be made alive. "He will see His

offspring,” and He will be eternally glorified and exalted. Jesus promised He would rise: “Destroy this body, in three days I’ll raise it again. As Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the earth.” A day and a night, really referring to any part of a day.

The apostles, then, preached the resurrection. You start in the book of Acts with the first sermon by Peter. You preach the resurrection all through the book of Acts in apostolic preaching. The subject was the death and resurrection of Christ to show the Messiah had to suffer and then rise and establish His kingdom. And then the church began at the very beginning to meet on the first day to commemorate the resurrection. That’s why we meet today to commemorate the resurrection.

It is that first, first day that we see in chapter 20 of John. Let’s look at it.

“Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came early to the tomb, while it was still dark, and saw the stone already taken away from the tomb. So she ran and came to Simon Peter and the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and said to them, ‘They’ve taken away the Lord out of the tomb, we do not know where they have laid Him.’ So Peter and the other disciple went forth, and they were going to the tomb. The two were running together; and the other disciple ran ahead faster than Peter and came to the tomb first; and stooping and looking in, he saw the linen wrappings lying there; but he did not go in. And so Simon Peter also came, following him, and entered the tomb; and he saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the face-cloth which had been on His head, not lying with the linen wrappings, but rolled up in a place by itself. So the other disciple who had first come to the tomb then also entered, and he saw and believed. For as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead. So the disciples went away again to their own homes.”

Fascinating scene simply recorded for us. What the writer John wants us to understand is that Jesus rose from the dead, and the proof of it, first of all, is the empty tomb, the empty tomb. Let’s look a little more closely. It’s the first day of the week; that would be Sunday. It is early. It is so early it is still dark. The Jews numbered their days. They didn’t name them like we do Sunday, Monday, and so forth - they numbered them. Sabbath was the seventh day, because it commemorated the seventh day when God rested from creation, and they always worshiped on the Sabbath day. So this was the first day after Sabbath. This was our Sunday.

Jesus said He would rise on the third day. He had been buried on Friday. He was in the grave a few hours on Friday before sundown. He was there all 24 hours of Saturday. And He would have been there about 12 hours of Sunday, because the Jewish days went from sunset to sunset rather than sunrise to sunrise. Friday ended at sunrise. Jesus had already been in the grave on Friday, all through Saturday from sunset to sunset, and now about 12 hours on Sunday.

It is early. Mark says it’s “very early,” and the sun had risen. Luke says it is “early dawn.” Matthew says “it began to dawn.” John says “while it was still dark.” I love that. I love the honesty of that. There’s no commiseration here. No editor is saying, “Well, this is a little bit different here. We might want to harmonize all of this.”

The integrity of Scripture is maintained in the honesty of these statements. Clearly all of them placed the arrival at the same time. It’s daybreak, and when it’s daybreak it is very early. And when it’s daybreak, as Mark says, “the sun has risen.” As Luke says, it is “early dawn.” As Matthew says, “it

began to dawn.” And as John says, there’s still a dusky darkness. The sun may have just arisen over the eastern desert. But the eastern desert was behind the Mount of Olives, which loomed over the city of Jerusalem and created literally shadow until the sun came across the top of the Mount of Olives. Until then the city would be absorbed in the dusky darkness.

Such beautiful, simple credibility in untampered perspectives by those four writers. But more specifically, it was John who said “it was still dark” when Mary Magdalene came to the tomb. What that tells us, and what we know to be true from the other writers, is that she was the first one there; she was the first one there. Dawn happens fairly rapidly; but when she came, being the first one, it was still on the dark side of dawn.

Now she didn’t start out alone. According to Matthew 27 another Mary, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, was with her; so she wasn’t alone. But she got there first. She’s in a hurry to get there, and she gets there before the other Mary. Matthew tells us in Matthew 28:1 both Marys headed for the tomb. But now we know Mary Magdalene got there first.

Now there were even other women who were coming along as well. There were women at the foot of the cross. The same women who were at the foot of the cross were there on Friday when Joseph and Nicodemus were burying the body of Jesus. It says in Luke 23:55, “The women who had come with the Lord out of Galilee saw the tomb and where the body was laid.”

So they were at the cross, they were at the burial, and of course, they don’t go anywhere or travel anywhere on the Sabbath. The Sabbath is over. They’ve awakened on the morning of the first day. The first thing they think about is getting back to the tomb. They actually have in mind, “We’ll go back and pour some more anointing on the body of Jesus.”

So that’s the scene as we come to verse 1. Mary Magdalene’s the first one. She comes early to the tomb while “it’s still dark,” and it’s light enough that she “saw the stone already taken away from the tomb.” She may have looked through the dusky darkness, and as the sun began to move a little higher it became clear to her that the stone had been “taken away from the tomb.”

Now we have a first line of evidence of the resurrection, the empty tomb. The stone wasn’t rolled away to let Jesus out. It was rolled away to let the witnesses in. A resurrected Jesus doesn’t need the stone to be removed. He didn’t need the door to be opened that night when He showed up with the apostles and came right through the door.

She arrives. She sees the stone taken away from the tomb. She fears the worst, verse 2, so “she ran.” She spun around and ran. She’s assuming that Jesus is still dead, but taken – taken. And that’s exactly what she says. She runs “to Simon Peter and the other disciple,” who is John, the one “whom Jesus loved,” and said to them, “They” – whoever she thought that “they” were – “have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him.”

Does it strike you that her shock here is clear evidence that they hadn’t planned to steal the body of Jesus. She doesn’t expect a resurrection. She is not part of a plot to fake a resurrection. They would never do that and then go out and preach and die as martyrs for something that they faked.

Peter and John run also. “Peter and the other disciple went forth,” verse 3, “and were coming to the

tomb. The two were running together.” Mary Magdalene gets to the tomb – just to fill in the blank – spins around when she sees the stone is rolled away. Maybe she took a peek and realized that the body was not there. She runs. She’s running to Peter and John.

In the meantime, in the meantime, the other women arrive. And when the other women arrive, the angels appear to them. She missed the angel. She has that wonderful experience later. But she’s on her way to Peter and John, who then turn and they begin to run as well.

Now none of these people know what’s happened on Saturday. They don’t know that the Sanhedrin got a Roman guard to guard the tomb, and then put a Roman seal on the stone so that no one would come to fake a resurrection. They put a seal, a Roman seal, which meant that it would become a crime, a violent crime, if you broke the Roman seal; and they put a significant amount of Roman soldiers there. They don’t know that.

They also don’t know that in the deep, dark night of Sunday, God sent a very localized earthquake. But before He sent the earthquake, He put all those soldiers under some kind of divine anesthesia, and they all went to sleep. And then came an earthquake, and with the earthquake the stone was rolled away. Matthew 28, verses 1-4 describes it.

The soldiers didn’t know what happened. The soldiers fled the tomb. Why not? They checked it. He’s gone. They can’t figure out why they went to sleep, because they were professional soldiers, and that was a violation of duty that had severe repercussions. They don’t know where the earthquake came from. They don’t know how the stone was rolled away. They don’t know why the body isn’t there, but it’s not. So there’s no reason to stay, so they leave.

We know they’re gone, because Mary Magdalene never refers to them when she gets there. The other women never refer to them when they get there. Peter and John never refer to them when they get there. They’re gone, startled awake in the deep Sunday darkness, shaken by the earthquake out of their divinely-induced comas. They know they have failed in their duty, and so they go right back to the Sanhedrin. And they are collective testimony that the body is not there, and they’re trying to handle this confusing reality. I’ll come back to them in a minute.

Meanwhile back at the tomb, Mary Magdalene has assumed that maybe somebody has stolen the body of Jesus. She has no thought of resurrection. She has no idea about resurrection. She runs to Peter and John; they don’t have any thought of resurrection either.

They run. The two are “running together.” John wants us to know that he was faster than Peter. Since he’s the author of this gospel he puts it in – twice. “The other disciple ran ahead faster than Peter, came to the tomb first.”

He was also a little more shy than Peter, and he’s “stooping, looked in, saw the linen wrappings lying there...didn’t go in. And so Simon Peter also came, following him, entered the tomb.” Peter was not shy.

Both had “entered the tomb...saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the face-cloth which had been on His head, not lying with the linen wrappings, but rolled up in a place by itself. So the other disciple who had first come to the tomb” – second time he refers to his speed - “then also entered, and he

saw and believed.”

I don't know just exactly what he believed fully, because the next verse says, “As yet they didn't understand the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead.” So he's maybe like the man who said, “Lord, I believe; help my unbelief.” The point that I want you to notice is that they had no expectation that Jesus would rise: the women didn't, the leaders of the apostles didn't.

As you think about those elements that we've just look at, let me just identify them. Here's the evidence of an empty tomb: the absent guards, the absent guards; the stone removed; the body gone; and then the grave clothes neatly lying in place. Now you have to go back to the burial and remember that they did not embalm - they wrapped bodies like a mummy. And in the case of Jesus, they had about a hundred-pound weight of spices. So they would wrap a little and then dump spices, and wrap and dump spices, and more and more and more and more; and the spices were simply designed to overpower the stench of decaying flesh. And then they would wrap around and around and around and around the head the spices as well. So the body was wrapped, and the head was wrapped separately.

Now if somebody stole the body, you would have to think that they wouldn't unwrap it. Why would you do that when it would be a whole lot easier to carry a body all wrapped up and at least smelling reasonable than it would be to unwrap a corpse and touch the flesh itself? Nobody would do that. But if, perchance, they might do that, you wouldn't see the linen wrappings lying in one place and the wrapping around and around the head lying in one place. There would be linen all over the tomb. They would have had to pull the linen and roll Him out of it. But the linen wrappings were lying there where the body had been, and the face wrappings where the head had been, because He had just gone through them, just gone through them.

This is no grave robbery. If the disciples did this, they wouldn't unwrap the body. And who else would do it to unwrap the body? The disciples wouldn't do it, because they didn't even expect a resurrection. Look, the body was there on Friday - everybody knew that. Everyone knew the body was there. Everyone knew He was dead. The Roman executioners knew He was dead; that's why he didn't break His legs.

Then they ran a spear into His side and out came blood and water, the indication that His heart had burst. He was dead. Several hours went by as they were wrapping Him and putting Him in the tomb. Clearly He was dead. Everybody knew He was in the grave. The tomb was covered in by the rolling of a large stone over the entrance, sealed with a Roman seal, and guarded by Roman soldiers. No one could come and steal the body.

But then who would? Certainly give the apostles more credit than that. They almost all, with the exception of John, died as martyrs. And they died because they preached Jesus crucified and risen; and if they faked His resurrection, that would have been absolutely the most idiotic thing they could have ever done. How could they sustain it their whole life, die as martyrs for a fraud, a hoax?

I think the Jewish leaders were more afraid Jesus would rise than the disciples believed He would. They were afraid of Him. They knew He raised Lazarus from the dead, and they weren't dealing with the Messianic disaster that the Jewish believers were dealing with. Let me explain what I mean.

The apostles expected Messiah to reign, and Messiah died. So this seemed to them to be the absolute end. The Jewish leaders didn't have any idea that Jesus was the Messiah. They saw Him as a blasphemer. But they were frightened of His power, and they actually admitted He had power, but they said His power is from hell. They were afraid of hell's power raising Him, as well as perhaps the disciples' trying to steal His body. So they put a guard and sealed the tomb. Clearly His body was there, and then it wasn't. No one saw the resurrection. You don't need to see it - He's gone.

Now let's pick up the soldiers. Go to Matthew 28. They're back at the Jewish supreme court trying to explain what happened. In the meantime the Lord's talking to His followers, telling them to go to Galilee, and He's going to meet them there. But in verse 11, "Some of the guard came into the city" – city of Jerusalem - and they're sheepishly reporting "to the chief priests all that had happened." What do you think they said? "We don't know what happened. We were all asleep. There was an earthquake, stone rolled away, body's gone. That's all we know." Totally confusing.

"So they assembled," in verse 12, "with the elders...consulted together." And the Sanhedrin, the Jewish elders, "gave a large sum of money to the soldiers." Do I hear bribery here? Whatever the soldiers said wasn't acceptable. You can't just say that there was an earthquake, and the stone rolled away, and the body's gone; that's not acceptable. So – they said – "You are to say," verse 13, "His disciples came by night and stole Him away while we were asleep.""

Small problem. How do you know that if you were asleep? What a stupid plot. "This is what you're to say: 'His disciples came by night and stole Him away while we were asleep.'" Well, the implications of that is they failed to do their duty; there's punishment for that.

What's going to happen when Pilate the governor finds out? Well, they have a plan for that too, verse 14: "If this should come to the governor's ears, we will win him over and keep you out of trouble." And by the way, the Jewish leaders owned Pilate, right, they owned him. That's why they forced him to crucify Jesus, even though he declared His innocence six times.

"So they took the money," verse 15, "took the money, did as they had been instructed." They went everywhere and said, "The disciples came and stole His body while we were asleep." "And this story was widely spread among the Jews, and is to this day." John's writing sixty years later, and that's still the story among the Jews: the disciples stole His body, the disciples stole His body.

So let's put it together. The tomb is empty. The women testify to an empty tomb. The soldiers testify to an empty tomb. Peter and John testify to an empty tomb. The grave clothes testify to an empty tomb. The Sanhedrin testifies to an empty tomb, and comes up with a ridiculous concoction to explain it away. No one ever denied the empty tomb - no one, no one. The women are shocked and terrified. They're shocked and terrified.

I just want to have you look at Mark 16, the last chapter of Mark, just to give you a little bit of a glimpse of what we're going to see a little bit later next week in John. This looks at the women.

Mark 16:1, "Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome, they brought spices coming to anoint Him." This is early. Again, "Early...the first day of the week," as verse 2 says, "when the sun had just risen. They're saying to one another as they approach, 'Who's going to roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?'" – which was the common thing to do, to put stones in front of tombs

– “Who’s going to roll the stone away so we can go in and put some more spice on His body?’ Looking up, they saw the stone had been rolled away, though it was extremely large.” That’s important to say, because it was the implication that the women couldn’t have done it.

“Entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting at the right, wearing a white robe.” Luke says there were two there, there were two. John says there were two and they were angels, two angels. First, they’re near the women, and then they’re at the head and the foot of where the body was and the linen cloth is lying.

Why two? Well, maybe Deuteronomy 19:15. All that is offered and all that is declared as true must be confirmed in the mouth of two witnesses. Matthew and Mark only refer to the one who speaks.

Now remember, the women have no idea of what happened. They’ve run into angels in this tomb, and they are “amazed.” That word means “to be awestruck,” *ekthambe*, again, an intensified word: “astonished, alarmed, terrified.” Luke uses *emphobos*, from which we get *phobic*. They’re so terrified, Luke says, “They bowed their faces to the ground.” I think probably the angels had to repeat themselves to get the point across in the middle of their shock.

Here you then have the second line of testimony. You have the testimony first of the empty tomb, then you have the testimony of heavenly angels. The angel said this: “Don’t be amazed; you’re looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who has been crucified. He has risen,” – there it is; that’s the explanation; that’s the truth – “He is not here; behold, the place where they laid Him. But go, and tell His disciples and Peter, “He is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see Him, just as He told you.” They went out and fled.” There’s a lot of running going on this morning. “They went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had gripped them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were in a panic.” They’re trying to process something they never, ever, ever expected.

Now go back to John for just a closing thought. John 20, verse 9. When the women finally began to clear their heads on this, and Peter and John began to realize what was going on, it says in verse 8 that John “believed.” We’re not sure exactly what he believed or how complete that faith was, “For as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead.” That would be Old Testament, and that would be New Testament Scripture. “So the disciples went away again to their own homes.” They just went home.

The ridiculous notion of critics through history that the disciples were so committed to the resurrection of Jesus that they fabricated is completely contrary to the testimony of Scripture. They don’t fully believe it until they see Him and touch Him.

The first line of testimony for the resurrection of Christ is the empty tomb, the second is the angelic declaration, and the third is the testimony of the eyewitnesses. That is yet to come. But let me just give you a final glimpse that will help you to understand the attitude of the disciples initially. Look at Luke 24, Luke 24. I’ll do this quickly.

Here are two disciples of Jesus, two followers of Jesus. Not the eleven, but two other followers – and there were a number of faithful followers. So they’re walking on the road to Emmaus, a town “seven miles from Jerusalem...talking to each other about all the things that had taken place. And while they



were talking and discussing, Jesus Himself approached and began traveling with them. But their eyes were prevented from recognizing Him.” This is on Sunday. This is the first day, the day He rose, and they don’t recognize Him because He’s now in a glorified form.

“Their eyes are prevented from recognizing Him...He said to them,” in verse 17, “‘What are these words that you’re exchanging with one another as you’re walking?’ And they stood still, looking sad. One of them, named Cleopas, answered and said to Him, ‘Are You the only one visiting Jerusalem and unaware of the things which have happened here in these days?’ And He said to them, ‘What things?’ And they said to Him, ‘The things about Jesus the Nazarene, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word in the sight of God and all the people, and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to the sentence of death, and crucified Him. But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, it is the third day since these things happened.’” So sad; it’s the third day. Oh, it’s true, verse 22. Some women were amazed and “‘were at the tomb...and didn’t find His body,’” verse 23, “‘and they came and said they also had seen a vision of angels who said that He was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just exactly as the women also had said; but they didn’t see Him’” – so sad – “‘O foolish men, slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!’”

What you find everywhere is this unbelief, or this small amount of faith that’s confused. They did not expect a resurrection. They did not fake a resurrection. They would not do that and then spend the rest of their lives preaching a false resurrection and dying as martyrs for someone who did not rise. So the unbelief of the disciples is crucial evidence for the reality of the resurrection.

Our Lord says, “‘You’re foolish....Was it not necessary for Christ to suffer these things and enter into His glory?’ Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.” Eventually He revealed Himself to them and then vanished from their sight (verse 31).

He reappeared that night with the rest of the apostles gathered (verse 44). He ate with them. He said, “‘These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, the Psalms must be fulfilled.’ Then He opened their minds to understand the Scripture, and He said to them, ‘It is written, that the Christ must suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. And you’re witnesses of these things.’” Finally, the eyewitnesses saw the risen Christ. It is their unbelief that is the first evidence for the resurrection, followed by their true belief in the risen Christ when they saw Him.

Father, we thank You again for the beauty, the consistency of the Word of God, and particularly with regard to this most marvelous of all events, the resurrection of our Savior. Thank You for opening it to us by the Holy Spirit in the inspired text. Now as we think about our crucified and buried and risen Savior, as we think about what He has done for us, may our hearts be filled with joy and gratitude. Wash us, make us clean, as we celebrate the death of our Savior and His glorious resurrection. And we ask that You would use us mightily for Your glory, in our Savior’s name. Amen.

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