



Pentecost

Series: Acts -- Worldwide Witness to the Worth of Jesus Christ

Acts 2:1-21

October 20, 2013

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The text that we are looking at this morning, the coming of the Holy Spirit to indwell the church on Pentecost, is easily one of the most abused, most poorly interpreted; most twisted and most erroneously preached passages in the Word of God. It has become the fountainhead of some of the most erroneous theology around. The result has been to present the Holy Spirit, the third member of the Trinity, as a caricature of Himself, as some sort of rogue god, unfaithful to His role in the redemption of sinners, divorced from His divine purpose to regenerate the sinful human heart, His mission to empower and the preaching and teaching of God's Word, His role to bring glory and honor to God the Father by making much of Jesus Christ, testifying to the glory of God in gospel of Jesus Christ, and empowering the witness of the church, in both word and deed, to the glory of Christ. Instead He has been presented as determined to gain glory and attention for himself. By ripping one element of this text out of its historical and redemptive context and magnifying one aspect of this text – speaking in tongues -- a host of preachers have diminished and reduced the Holy Spirit to the level of a circus hypnotist who capriciously and impulsively causes people to act in strange and bizarre ways, self-aggrandizing, fleshly ways, like sideshow distractions, ways that are wholly divorced from the eternal redemptive plan, wholly divorced from the proclamation of the gospel, wholly divorced from the saving work of Jesus Christ, and therefore wholly divorced from the mission of the church.

The result of this sort of unmoored preaching and teaching has been an unbiblical picture of both the person and the work of the Holy Spirit, an unbiblical picture of what it means to be filled with the Holy Spirit, a biblically inaccurate faith and a seeking for assurance in phenomenon and experiences instead of in the atoning work of Christ on the cross, an unbiblical fascination with signs and wonders, an unbiblical understanding of spiritual maturity, an unbiblical self-consumed, selfish absorption within the church, and a diminishing of the centrality of cross and of the worth of the Word of God. And as we are going to see this morning, most of all, it misses the glorious point of this text.

Acts 2 must be interpreted in the light of Acts 1 and particularly the words of the risen Lord Jesus when He instructed His disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the promise of the Father, the Holy Spirit. He told them that they would “baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” (Acts 1:5, ESV) And He told them clearly what the purpose of this divine visitation from Heaven would be for – “...you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” (Acts 1:8, ESV)

What occurred at Pentecost is one of the singular, epochal, and unrepeatable moments in redemptive history – like that of creation, the exodus, the incarnation, the crucifixion, the resurrection and ascension, and the second coming of Jesus Christ in glory. It is unique, unrepeatable, a defining moment in redemptive history. Derek Thomas calls it “a staging post on a much grander vista of biblical history. It signals that something had been done (the atoning work of Christ, the actual redemption of His church by the shedding of His blood and His resurrection from the dead) and that something had not yet been fully accomplished (the gathering of all the people of God from every corner of the earth into the visible church of Jesus Christ). What took place at Pentecost is a part of the continuing ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ, the keeping of Jesus’ promise to His disciples when He said: ““But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me.” (John 15:26, ESV) We have to keep this in the forefront of our minds as we approach this text this morning. The coming of the Holy Spirit is to bear witness to Christ, to shine divine light on the person and ministry of Jesus Christ, not to draw attention to Himself or even to the disciples themselves.

God moved on Pentecost to fill His church with His presence and the power by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit so that Christ will be glorified among the nations. The pervasive point of Pentecost is the gospel mission, and the goal of the gospel mission is that “the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.” (Habakkuk 2:14, ESV) So let’s look at this text this morning and I want to help you to understand it by preaching it under three broad headings – divine timing, divine invasion, and divine intent. Look with me first at the:

Divine Timing (v.1) Luke writes: “When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place.” (Acts 2:1, ESV) Now at first blush that doesn’t seem to say too much and in our English translations we can miss the significance of what Luke is attempting to convey. He is

saying that when the fullness of Pentecost had come, when the true Pentecost had arrived, when day of Pentecost had fully come, the reality that the other previous celebrations of Pentecost had pointed to, the disciples were all together in one place. The emphasis is not on the place, but on the time – this divine moment in history.

Just as the sacrifice of Christ on the cross was the divine and eternally redemptive fulfillment of the pictures of sacrificial system, the Day of Atonement, the sacrifices in the Temple, all the shadows of Christ in the OT – so too the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples was a fulfillment of the shadow of Pentecosts past. How so?

Pentecost means fiftieth and it comes on the Jewish calendar fifty days after Passover. It was an OT feast day also known as the Feast of Harvest, the Feast of Weeks, and it celebrated the firstfruits of the wheat harvest. Central to its celebration was the offering of the firstfruits of the new grain in form of a wave offering of bread before the Lord in thanksgiving and in anticipation of the greater harvest that was to come. It seems like simply an agricultural thing, but to God it held much greater significance. It was not merely a offering anticipating a future grain harvest but symbolized something far greater – all of Israel’s feasts did. It was a picture of a great harvest of people for God Himself, the harvest of souls into the Kingdom of God. From the small beginnings of the remnant in Israel and the few Gentile proselytes in the OT, to the small band of disciples in Jerusalem, was to come a harvest of the entire earth, the fields of the Lord – Pentecost, the true Pentecost had come.

But even more than that, Pentecost had become in the nation of Israel, the time in which the Israelites would celebrate the giving of the Law by God in His great descent upon Mt. Sinai, when He drew near to the nation in fire and smoke, in lightning, thundering and earthquake – drawing near yet remaining far off, separated by the boundary around the mountain to keep the people away. And now, when Pentecost had fully come, God would again draw near to His people, by His Holy Spirit and would bring to pass the prophecies of Jeremiah and Ezekiel. First Jeremiah who wrote: “For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.” (Jeremiah 31:33–34, ESV) And then the prophecy of Ezekiel: “And I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them. I will remove the heart

of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in my statutes and keep my rules and obey them. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God.” (Ezekiel 11:19–20, ESV) God was drawing near again, only this time not to remain far off from His people, but to dwell with them and live in true communion with them.

On the day in which Israel celebrated the giving of the Law, God was sending His Spirit so that they may walk in the Spirit of The Law. It was the divine time – the divine time for God’s great harvest to commence, and it would be accomplished by a

Divine Invasion (v. 2-14) Luke writes: “And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.” (Acts 2:2–4, ESV) The coming of the Holy Spirit, the permanent invasion of God into the lives of His people, did not happen in quiet seclusion but was bold and big and powerful. Luke almost sounds like John in the book of Revelation, as he searches for words to describe in an understandable way, the amazing invasion of the Holy Spirit into the midst of the disciples. And the words that He uses are significant, filled with meaning, filled with symbolic significance to help us understand the wonder of what is taking place – wind, fire, and other tongues. I want you to see that the focus in this text is not on the individual disciples, not on what they were doing, not on their actions, but on the act of God breaking forth into His earth in power just as He had done at MT Sinai when He brought forth the Law, but now in Jerusalem, He was pouring out His Spirit, pouring out His presence, His majesty, His glory upon and through His church, His people.

First, he says, there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind. And it is significant that the word that Luke uses is wind. The word for spirit, wind and breath is the same word both in Hebrew – “ruach” and in Greek – “pneuma”. And that is of great significance. It immediately points us to the creative and re-creative power of God.

It takes us back to the words of Genesis 1:2: “The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.” (Genesis 1:2, ESV) -- back before God by Christ through the Breath of His mouth created all that is. It reminds us of Ezekiel 37, the great vision of the valley of dry bones, where

God commanded Ezekiel to preach the Word of the Lord to the dry bones and Ezekiel writes: “So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I prophesied, there was a sound, and behold, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. And I looked, and behold, there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them. But there was no breath in them. Then he said to me, “Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, Thus, says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live.” So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army.” (Ezekiel 37:7–10, ESV) The creative, life-giving power of God!

It takes us back to John 3 where Jesus spoke to Nicodemus, telling him, “You must be born again, born from above – that which is born of flesh is flesh – it’s dead, but that which is born of the Spirit is spirit – it’s alive.” Then He said: “The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”” (John 3:8, ESV) The re-creative, life-giving power of God.

With this sound like that of a mighty rushing wind, Luke means for us to see the Holy Spirit was doing a mighty creative work. He was creating the church, a new creation marked by the fire of God’s presence.

Luke says: divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. Fire, in the OT, was a picture of the presence of God. There was the flaming torch and smoking fire pot by which God confirmed His covenant with Abraham in Genesis 15, the burning bush from which God called Moses, the pillar of God’s fire – God’s Shekinah glory – that led the children of Israel by night, the Lord speaking from the midst of fire in Deuteronomy 4 leading Moses to say of God, “For the Lord your God is a consuming fire...” (Deuteronomy 4:24, ESV). These appearances of fire declared that God was present with them, but that they were divided and rested upon each of them, all of the disciples, demonstrated that God was not merely with them, but that God had come to His people to dwell in them, both individually and corporately, and to forever be with them as us -- His presence with us, abiding in us, purifying us as a holy people unto Himself, empowering us to obey His commands, sealing us for the day when our redemption will be fully revealed.

Last, Luke says: And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. All of the disciples were speaking in other tongues – what does that mean? It means that they were speaking in the languages of the nations, languages they did not know, languages not native to them. They spoke in the languages of the Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to ...the Cretans and Arabians, verses 9-10 tell us. It was not ecstatic speech, not some mythical prayer language, not gibberish, but known languages and what were they saying? They were, as the onlookers said, telling in the languages of the nations, in their tongues, the mighty works of God. They were magnifying God, declaring His greatness and glory, declaring the mighty works of His hands, worshipping, praising and adoring Him in a way the nations could understand. What was going on? Nothing less than the reversal of the curse at Babel, when man had tried to make his glory known and attempted to erect a monument to sinful man to reach into the heavens. God confounded man on that day and confused His languages. But on this day, when there was gathered together in the city of Jerusalem people from every nation under heaven, people who spoke different languages, still divided by the barrier erected so many years before at Babel, by a supernatural work of His Spirit, God caused the Gospel to be preached in such a way that the language barrier disappeared as people heard the disciples telling of the mighty works of God in their own native languages. More powerful than the sin that separated them is the gospel of Jesus Christ proclaimed in the power of the Holy Spirit.

God was breaking into the earth, invading His people, filling His church with His Holy Spirit and let me speak to that for just a moment, because this is significant and needs to be rightly understood. Two things were taking place in this room as the Holy Spirit fell upon the disciples – the baptism of and the filling of the Holy Spirit. I'm not going to go into a long treatise and miss the focus of the rest of this passage as a result, but I do want to make this clear. The manner in which the disciples received the baptism of the Holy Spirit is unique and it had to be because of the nature of the transition from the old covenant to the fulfillment of the new. This is not the normative pattern for the baptism of the Holy Spirit. A lot of men want to preach that it is – but just the tongues part. They ignore the sound of the mighty rushing wind and the visible fire of God's presence, because that cannot be mimicked.

Before the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit regenerated men and empowered them for serving God, but He did not permanently indwell all believers. In the Upper Room, in John 14, Jesus told the disciples that He would send the Holy Spirit to be with them forever. He said: "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of

truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.” (John 14:16–17, ESV) Therefore, on Pentecost, the disciples were baptized with the Holy Spirit in fulfillment of Jesus’ promise. They were immersed into Christ, sealed unto God by the Holy Spirit, personally and permanently joined to Christ by the work of God when the Holy Spirit came to live in them permanently, joining them to Christ and to all who are in Christ by faith. Later we see something similar repeated in Acts 8, where the Spirit was poured out on the Samaritans through the ministry of the apostles. Visible signs occurred so that both the Samaritans and the apostles would realize that they were now members of the same body of Christ. Both Jews and half Jews could be saved. The same thing happened with the Gentiles in Acts 10 and with the followers of John’s baptism in Ephesus (Acts 19). These were all transitional outpourings of the Holy Spirit. Accompanied by verifying and visible signs but then that is the end of it. We do not see this again in the Word of God. The disciples, very differently from us, received the baptism and fullness of the Holy Spirit after they were converted and for them it could be no other way. That was the necessity of the transition of the age, through which they passed, from old covenant promise to new covenant fulfillment. The reason for the signs and wonders that occurred was to authenticate the invisible baptism that they had received.

But now that the transition is accomplished, all that believe in Christ receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit, His permanent indwelling, at the moment of salvation as we understand from Gal. 3:2. Later Paul tells the Corinthians, “For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body— Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.” (1 Corinthians 12:13, ESV) And to the Romans he says: “You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.” (Romans 8:9, ESV) The baptism of the Holy Spirit is not some second blessing that only a few receive – it is the promise of God for all of His children.

So, again, in the baptism of the Holy Spirit, believers are united to Christ, immersed in the Lord, sealed by the Spirit, brought into personal and permanent union with Jesus Christ. That is baptism in the Spirit and now it happens at salvation and it is invisible. We are never told to pray for the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The disciples were not commanded to do so. They probably did, just as we pray for Christ to return, but they were not baptized by the Holy Spirit because they prayed, but because of the will and purpose of God. Baptism with the Holy Spirit is not a spiritual experience we are commanded to seek; it is an act of God performed on a believer at the moment of salvation, never to be repeated.

However, believers are called to be filled with the Spirit, that is, to be yielded to the Spirit's control. The disciples on the Day of Pentecost were not only baptized with the Spirit. They were all also filled with the Holy Spirit, completely yielded to His control and influence. And this was not simply a one-time event, as we will see as we go through the book of Acts. Repeatedly they were filled with the Spirit as they took the gospel to the world. To be filled with the Spirit, we must empty ourselves of self-rule by confessing all known sin and by dying to self, seeking to be obedient to the will and the command of God. We must yield ourselves fully to the Lord and depend on Him step by step, what Galatians 5:16 calls "walking in the Spirit." Colossians 3:16, in a parallel passage, equates being filled with the Spirit to letting the word of Christ richly dwell in you. Being filled with the Spirit and being filled with the Word of God go together. And being filled with the Spirit has some observable results, just as it does here. The manifestation was specific to the moment and symbolic in nature – the declaration of the mighty works of God to the nations and the opening of the gospel to the world.

Today, as we consistently walk in the Spirit, submitting ourselves to the Word of God and by faith relying upon the empowering and transforming work of the Holy Spirit in us, the result is also a manifestation -- the manifestation of Christ's character, called the fruit of the Holy Spirit – "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control..." (Galatians 5:22–23, ESV) manifested in our lives and relationships and we will be empowered to bear witness to Christ in the world and fulfill the callings He has placed upon us.

The coming of the promised Holy Spirit to dwell with and in God's people marked a new era in redemptive history. This was the Messianic age, a new era in which all of the glorious promises of the OT prophets would be fulfilled. As John Stott says: "Without the Holy Spirit, Christian discipleship would be inconceivable, even impossible. There can be no life without the life-giver, no understanding without the Spirit of truth, no fellowship without the unity of the Spirit, no Christlikeness of character apart from his fruit, and no effective witness without his power. As a body without breath is a corpse, so the church without the Spirit is dead." This amazing event, this divine invasion, did not go unnoticed. Luke says: "Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. And they were amazed and astonished, saying, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own

tongues the mighty works of God.” And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” But others mocking said, “They are filled with new wine.”” (Acts 2:5–13, ESV)

I want you to see this. Four words are used to describe the reaction of these devout Jews from all over the world who had gathered in Jerusalem for Pentecost – bewildered, amazed, astonished and perplexed. They were bewildered – staggered and stunned by what was going on around them. They were amazed – pushed out of their senses, blown away by what they were seeing and hearing; astonished – marveling and wondering at what was going on; and they were perplexed – looking for answers, their thoughts running away with them. So much so that they looked at one another and asked, “What does this mean?”

I want you to see that the powerful work of the Holy Spirit in these believers caused those who saw the effects to ask questions, to want to know what was going on. Part of the problem in evangelism today is that our lives are not raising enough questions. We are too much like the world, rather than being filled with the Holy Spirit. Some of us try to see how close we can get to acting and talking like the world, rather than seeing how close we can get to living like a believer! It raised questions – what is going on? But it also caused mocking and joking -- “They are filled with new wine.” They were filled with new wine, the wine of the Spirit but that is not what these mockers had in mind. Still, with all of the people around the question of what all of this meant hanging in the air, Peter took the opportunity to describe the

Divine Intent (v. 14-21) Deftly dismissing the mocking of some in the crowd, Peter says to them: “Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. For these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day.” (Acts 2:14–15, ESV) He turns the joke back on them. Not being defensive, Peter says in effect, “It’s too early in the day for us to be drunk.” Then Peter tells them the meaning of what is taking place, how they are to understand this.

He says: “But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel: “ ‘And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they

shall prophesy.” (Acts 2:16–18, ESV) Peter quotes Joel, but not exactly. At the very beginning, Peter changes the original word “afterward” to “in the last days.” Pentecost, Peter says, has ushered in “the last days.” It is a mistake to confine the expression “last days” to the period of time immediately before Christ’s second coming. The entire period between the incarnation and the second coming are the last days. The pouring out of the Holy Spirit has inaugurated the end, the last hour is now! And in these last days, God has poured out His Spirit on all kinds of people – not just kings and prophets and priests, but the great and small, the rich and the poor, sons and daughters, old and young, servants and freemen. God is pouring out His Spirit in these days for one great purpose – that all shall prophesy, that His truth shall be proclaimed and preached, declared to all of the nations.

Do you see? Peter does not even mention speaking in tongues, per se. that is because speaking in tongues is not the focus, the content of what was being said is! The purpose of the pouring out of the Holy Spirit is not self-exaltation, not self-aggrandizement, not self-fulfillment, not for gee-whiz manifestations in worship services, not to make ourselves feel good, not to establish a spiritual pecking order of the haves and have-nots, but for the fulfilling of the mission to preach the gospel to the ends of the earth for the glory of God! That is the reason for the giving of the Holy Spirit. Certainly there are some personal blessings involved, but the emphasis here, as it should be with us, is on the proclamation of the Word of God for the purpose of salvation of the nations. Even the transformative work of the Spirit in our lives to make us walk worthy of the calling of Jesus Christ is so that they testimony of the gospel would have credibility and very real evidence of its power in our lives! The giving of the Holy Spirit is not just to make us better or more holy people, but to be greater witnesses. I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.

And Peter gives us a sense of the urgency of the hour saying: “And I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke; the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day.” (Acts 2:19–20, ESV) Quoting Joel, Peter declares the judgment that is coming. We are familiar with these kinds of worlds from the preaching of Jesus as He spoke of the day that He would return to receive His people to Himself and to inflict eternal judgment and punishment upon all the unbelieving, the unrepentant sinner.

There is judgment coming, but Peter ends with this glorious promise of God’s grace: “And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” (Acts

2:21, ESV) We are in the last days; the judgment of God is looming ever close. We do not know the day or the hour, but we know the way of refuge, the way of deliverance, the way of rescue, the way of eternal life. Here is the great mercy of our God! He offers to those who deserve His judgment a way of escape -- everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. And as He will go on to prove in the rest of his incredible sermon, "Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified."" (Acts 2:36, ESV)

What does Pentecost mean to us?

What does Pentecost mean to us? The story of Pentecost tells us of the great faithfulness of the Lord to His church and to His glory. Pentecost declares that God is present with His people. Through the atoning work of the Lord Jesus Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, God is with us in a way that no Old Testament saint ever knew. He is with us, not only to teach, comfort, and guide us, but also to empower us to carry out the Great Commission. What news could be better than this? To God be the glory. And our purpose is to spread the knowledge of God to all the nations, beginning here in our own "Jerusalem." If we lose our outward focus, the calling to manifest God's glory in the earth, we have lost our reason for existence.

With that in mind, there are some questions that we truly need to consider as we meditate on these words this morning – three groups of questions...

First, am I living in light of the divine intent of Pentecost? Do I live my life consciously dependent on the Holy Spirit? Am I in the Word, am I yielding myself to God in a conscious way as a pattern of my life? Do I seek Him for holiness and for power to make Christ compelling in my pattern of living? Is the life of the Holy Spirit evident in me?

Second, am I truly motivated by the glory of God in all things? Am I? Is it evident in the things that I think about? Do I fight sin and pursue holiness for His glory? Is the glory of God really the motivating factor in my life? Do I desire His will foremost and not my own?

Third, do I have the desire to bear witness to the saving grace of God in Christ to those who are lost and perishing? The gift of the Holy has not been given to me only for me. He has been given so my life and words, my attitudes and character would bear witness to His saving grace. Is my passion to live in union and fellowship with God so that the fame of God's name would be known throughout the world, that the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea?

That should be the meaning of Pentecost to you and me, because it was the meaning of Pentecost to Almighty God.

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