A Psalm of the Sabbath, A Psalm of the Savior

Psalm 92

By **Sean Morris**

If you have your Bibles with you or perhaps one there in the pew pockets in front of you, turn with me if you would now, to Psalm 92. Psalm 92. You can find it there on page 498 in your pew Bible. As you're turning there, allow me to say what an honor it is to stand before you and open God's Word with you tonight. As indeed it's been an honor every time I've stood in this pulpit. Sarah and I want you to know, First Presbyterian Church, how very much we love you. Many of you will know by now, and maybe some don't, I have since completed my studies at RTS and have received and accepted a call at a PCA church in Virginia and so we'll be moving there at the end of the month of January. I cannot tell you how grateful I am and how profoundly I have been shaped and impacted for a lifetime of future ministry by my time here among you. I have been mentored by Dr. Duncan and now David, by Ralph and Billy and all the ministers here, and you all have invested in us and opened your homes and opened your lives to us and loved us in profound ways and so we're thankful to you and we pray that the Lord in His kind providence would cause our paths to cross many times in the coming years ahead. I was asked by the church in Virginia just what I thought of my time in seminary and internship and experience here and I said, "Well if you'll allow me I'll plagiarize from Brian Habig by saying that when it comes to First Presbyterian Church I owe her a debt I cannot repay. And number two, that the people of First Presbyterian Church hold nothing but the highest place of affection in our hearts." So we love you. Thank you. It is an honor to stand before you tonight.

Well then, enough of that! It is the Lord's Day and we are the Lord's people and we are here to be gathered under the Lord's Word! So let's get to it. Psalm 92, and before we read God's Word, let's pray.

Lord, this is Your Word and so we ask that You would teach us from it because here we have food and drink for our soul - the words of life from You, the Author of life. And so we pray that You would open Your Word to us and we would behold wondrous things within it this night. We ask it in Jesus' name, amen.

Psalm 92. This is the Word of Almighty God. Hear it:

A PSALM. A SONG FOR THE SABBATH.

It is good to give thanks to the LORD, to sing praises to your name, O Most High; to declare your steadfast love in the morning, and your faithfulness by night, to the music of the lute and the harp, to the melody of the lyre. For you, O LORD, have made me glad by your work; at the works of your hands I sing for joy.

How great are your works, O LORD! Your thoughts are very deep! The stupid man cannot know; the fool cannot understand this: that though the wicked sprout like grass and all evildoers flourish, they are doomed to destruction forever; but you, O LORD, are on high forever. For behold, your enemies, O LORD, for behold, your enemies shall perish; all evildoers shall be scattered.

But you have exalted my horn like that of the wild ox; you have poured over me fresh oil. My eyes have seen the downfall of my enemies; my ears have heard the doom of my evil assailants.

The righteous flourish like the palm tree and grow like a cedar in Lebanon. They are planted in the house of the LORD; they flourish in the courts of our God. They still bear fruit in old age; they are ever full of sap and green, to declare that the LORD is upright; he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him.

Amen, thus far God's holy, inspired, and inerrant Word to us tonight.

The Christian Life and the Centrality of the Lord's Day

Two thoughts that I would like for us to consider as a sort of preface and segue into our study of this psalm tonight - do you love the Lord's Day? Do you love the Lord's Day? And do you view it as crucial, as indispensable to your life as a Christian? Do you love the Lord's Day and do you view it as indispensable to your life as a Christian?

Here we stand, another holiday season is over, and around the corner, we're peering just down at it, is another year and we're settling back into a routine rhythm. Might I suggest that a Scripture passage like Psalm 92 is exactly what we need tonight as we think afresh about our daily life as disciples of the Lord Jesus. In many ways Psalm 92 tells us about the Lord's Day, especially what it is and what it's for. You see as we study discipleship in Scripture and from our spiritual forefathers and our Reformed heritage, we keep coming back over and over again to a conclusion that there is a real battle for the health of our souls and that this day is an essential component in our arsenal, in our fight for godliness; it is a God-ordained ingredient for our living of the Christian life. A number of us were just having this conversation prior to the service beginning tonight - how many churches we know of that have cancelled services, not just in

the evening but all day today, on December 28. And isn't it ironic, no, providential that we should think afresh about the Sabbath, about the Lord's Day, and the centrality of it in the Christian life.

So here comes Psalm 92, and like a fresh wind it resituates our thinking and it centers us once again for how we're going to think and live as disciples of the Lord Jesus. One man said this, "It is the central heartbeat of the Christian's life - this weekly gathering of God's people and the weekly rhythm of experiencing God on Sunday." And Psalm 92, I think, just serves up that kind of theology for us on a silver platter.

So there are a number of legitimate ways that we could outline this text but I want to look at it with you tonight under four headings. First, in verses 1 through 4, we have a psalm of delight. Second, in verses 5 through 11, we have a psalm of doom. Third, in verses 12 through 15 we have a psalm of blessing. And then fourth, recapping a bit in verses 8 through 11, a psalm of the Savior. A psalm of delight, a psalm of doom, a psalm of blessing, and a psalm of the Savior.

I. A Psalm of Delight

So then first, verses 1 through 4 - a psalm of delight. Notice even the inscription there at the top of the psalm before verse 1, "A PSALM. A SONG FOR THE SABBATH." It's the only psalm in the Psalter that's given this inscription. Now of course all the psalms are appropriate for the Sabbath and good for the Sabbath but the author here is cluing us in on the fact that it's a psalm that is especially appropriate for the Sabbath because it helps us to understand what this day is for. And as we look at verses 1 through 4 we learn very clearly here that the worship and the assembly of God's people is a sheer delight for this believer, a sheer delight. And what is it that fills this man with such sheer delight? Well notice three things in particular.

God Himself

Notice verse 1 - it is God Himself that moves this believer to such sheer delight; God Himself. "It is good to sing praise to the LORD" - *Yahweh*; the LORD, *Yahweh*. That's His covenant name, the personal name disclosed to Moses, to the children of Israel communicating a holy nearness to His people, an intimacy. "To sing praises to your name, O Most High." That's the Hebrew word, "*Elyohn*" - Most High. It's a Hebrew title of majesty describing the transcendent greatness of God above in all of His resplendent, transcendent glory. This God, he says, this God, the God of our fathers, the Lord of all creation who is both transcendent above and yet immanent and as close to us as a whisper, this God who is "infinite and eternal and unchangeable in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth,"... merely thinking about this God moves this man to worship and bow down. God Himself moves him to sheer delight.

God's Works of Redemption

But notice verse 2. Not only God Himself but it's God's redemptive works that move this man to sheer delight. See what he says there. "To declare your steadfast love in the morning and your faithfulness by night." So he's using the language of the old covenant temple sacrifices at the time for the morning and evening sacrifice in the holy convocation, the assembly of God's people; this man loves to declare God's steadfast love and faithfulness. His steadfast love - that's an Old Testament word, a Hebrew word, hesed, hesed. It's one of the greatest Hebrew words in all of Scripture. What does it mean? I love one definition. One man defines it this way. "Hesed is God's stubborn determination to be true to His covenant and to be kind to your soul, no matter how long it takes Him, no matter how much it costs Him, and no matter what you deserve." Let me say that again. Hesed, the steadfast love of God, is God's stubborn determination to be true to His covenant, to be kind to your soul, no matter how long it takes Him, no matter how much it costs Him, and no matter what you deserve. You see, the psalmist can look back to the promises made to Abraham, to the exodus under Moses, to the era of Joshua and the judges and King David and the promise of an eternal King on Israel's throne and he is bursting with praise on account of God's steadfast love when he thinks back on his lovingkindness to his people.

Well friends, if this is the psalmist's reaction regarding God's stubborn covenant love to His people, how much more should this reaction be true of us, my dear friends? We who look back and it's exactly what this season, these past four weeks throughout our Advent season, we've been reflecting on, isn't it? We who look back on even more evidence of God's unrelenting faithfulness, of Christ the eternal Son of God who, in the fullness of time, took on flesh, was born of a woman, born under the Law to redeem those under the Law, drinking the cup of God's wrath down to the dregs, swallowing up death and hell in His glorious resurrection so that all those who look to Him and are united to Him by faith are forever made clean and adopted into the family of God. You see, we think back and we look back on that glorious truth and so we can join with those words from aged Zechariah from Luke's gospel and we can say, "Blessed be the Lord, God of Israel! He has visited and redeemed His people to show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember His holy covenant, to give knowledge of salvation to His people in the forgiveness of their sins."

Now if that isn't something to sing about, I don't know what is! And that's exactly what the psalmist here is zeroing in on - the *hesed* of God. And what better day, he says, than this day, on this day of rest and gladness, to sing about the glory and the faithfulness and the steadfast love of our God.

Verse 3, he makes note here of the music and the instruments used in temple worship. He loves, do you see that there, he loves to sing of the covenant faithfulness of God his Redeemer with all the splendor and beauty of music, worshipping God on His day.

God's Works of Creation

And then notice, verse 4, God Himself, God's works of redemption, but also God's work of creation moved this man to sheer delight. He says there, "For you, O Lord, have made me glad by your work. At the work of your hands I sing for joy." He's contemplating the majesty of all that the hands of God, the fingers of God have brought into being - from the mighty cosmos of the universe itself in all of its 92 billion light-years of observable length, all the way down to the tiniest little mycoplasma next to which the human hair is five hundred times wider. All creation declares that this God who made all these things is worthy of our praise and this is the day for just that kind of praise.

Not just Right, but Good

So God Himself, God's redemption, God's creation, but also notice this lesson that he's teaching us here. We see here that it's not simply right to worship God but it's good; it's good to worship God. Not just right, not just morally commendable or some sort of obedient Christian duty, but it is intrinsically good. You know people will sometimes draw this distinction, this dichotomy between the Old Testament and the New Testament and they'll say, "Well yes, yes, the Old Testament worship was largely focused on the external and on ceremonial matters but in the New Testament, well here is where we finally reach the heart of true religion. This is where we finally get real worship. Take another look at this man of Psalm 92. Does this man here look like a man who is miserable in his religion or in the exercise of his worship or in the practice of the day of his God? No. For the believer, this psalmist is showing us, "This is our life and joy. How great God is and how kind He has been in and of Himself in creation, in redemption. What a day this is to discover again what it means to enjoy Him forever." It is good to give thanks to the Lord. It's a psalm of delight.

II. A Psalm of Doom

But then secondly, in verses 5 through 11 we read here of a psalm of doom. Here we have a warning. As is typical of so much Hebrew poetry, there is a stark contrast held up here for us. Do you see it? Verse 5, he says, "How great are your works, O LORD! Your thoughts are very deep!" And then immediately there, verse 6, "The stupid man cannot know; the fool cannot understand this: that though the wicked sprout like grass and all evildoers flourish, they are doomed to destruction forever; but you, O LORD, are on high forever." The fool, the stupid man - the Hebrew word there is literally "brutish," brutish - like a cow, like a dumb beast he's comparing him to. He's talking here about the enemy of God, the unenlightened, the unregenerate, the rebel who is in love with the things of this world scorning his Creator. It's striking that even as the psalmist meditates on the glory and the might and the power of his God there is this word of judgment here.

See, the psalmist is cognizant of the fact that God the King and God the Judge is coming and that He is coming one day with a righteous wrath. You see, the psalmist knows reality and that is one of the things that is so refreshingly helpful about Psalm 92 that he lives in a world where everything is not as it should be. Wickedness abounds - he's talking about it here; justice is perverted. He lives in a world where sin seems normal and holiness seems strange, dangerous even, narrow-minded, bigoted.

The psalmist's world and our world are not that terribly different, are they? He looks around and it's all he can do to not give up and say, "What is the point?" Do you ever feel like that? You strive for holiness and to faithfully follow the Savior and you come to a point where you're exhausted, you're tired, you're bent down, you've been nothing but beaten up against for the whole week or for the month or for the year that has been, and you simply want to throw up your hands and say, "What is the point anymore?" Well Psalm 92 comes again and it recalibrates our clouded thinking in a sin-sick world. The psalmist says, "This is why I love this day!" We need a day to recalibrate our souls and to come back into the presence of God, to readjust our gazes toward eternity, that day when God comes again, when God will make everything right, right-side up again, when everything wrong will become untrue. And the psalmist says this is that kind of day to dwell on the eternal truths and to dwell on the justice of eternity and to glean hope and perseverance for all the trials and tribulations that I'm going through right now in a world that could not care less.

A Plea to the Unconverted

But you see, the psalmist is not just reveling in God's justice and he's not just gleaning hope here, but he's making a plea with the wicked. You see, this psalm was meant to be sung in public worship and this strong language appeals to the rebellious man, doesn't it, so that he might realize his folly and that he might flee to his God for refuge, his Creator. You see, Psalm 92 tells us that the Sabbath, the Lord's Day, is a day when we can remember that judgment is coming and so we plead with people the way this psalmist is pleading with the people in the assembly. He's saying, "Examine yourself. Take heed." Isn't that what we do? We gather to worship God in the assembly of His people, but as we proclaim God's Word, as we gather around God's Word, as we sing His praises, as we lift our prayers, we also plead with any in our midst who may not yet know Christ. We plead with them and say, "The righteous Lord is coming!" And even here, God is pleading. He's saying, "Come to Me for mercy! Come and cling to My Son! Let Him be the One who has died in your place and paid the penalty for all of your sins 2,000 years ago on Calvary's cross." For if He does not, then God will come to you in judgment. There is no refuge from Him; there's only refuge to be found in Him. And the psalmist is meditating deeply upon that here. It's a strong and sober reminder, but it's part of what this day is for.

III. A Psalm of Blessing

A psalm of delight, a psalm of doom, and then thirdly, a psalm of blessing - verses 12 through 15 we see that. It says there, "The righteous flourish like the palm tree and grow like a cedar in Lebanon. They are planted in the house of the LORD; they flourish in the courts of our God. They still bear fruit in old age; they are ever full of sap and green." It's a day of delight and it's a day of sobering truths and warning and a time to consider eternity, but it's also a day, do you see, to experience every kind of spiritual blessing. You understand that the psalmist is not saying, "Listen guys, we're going to have a rough time here, but don't worry, it's all going to pan out in the end. It's going to be great then." He's saying, "No, no, let me tell you what. In the midst of a world that is flourishing with evil, a sinsick world that fights and is conspiring to make the godly man languish and give up and fail, the person in that kind of world, the person who really flourishes in this life is the person who delights in the Lord his God."

There's three things here that he points out to us especially.

The Blessing of Assured Spiritual Victory

He tells of the blessing of assured spiritual victory. Do you see that there back in verse 11? Wickedness and the anguish of my soul and the harshness of my circumstances seem to be flourishing everywhere I look, but you see in the war room of God Almighty the battle has already been decided and this is a day to remember that, he says.

The Blessing of Enduring Spiritual Health

He tells of the blessing of enduring spiritual health there in verses 12 to 15. "They still bear fruit in old age; they are ever full of sap and green." Here is the perseverance of the saints. It's a beautiful Old Testament metaphor for God's continued blessing as the believer presses on in life, striding and striving in faith through all ages and all stages and circumstances. And let me tell you, as a younger believer speaking now to old believers, to older and wiser saints who are with us in the room who have dutifully and beautifully and faithfully pressing on in your faith, that is one of the greatest blessings to look around and see on a Sunday at First Presbyterian Church, to look around and see Christians who have been faithfully plodding along, faithfully walking the Christian life all those years and seeing you persevere and seeing you grow, even under languishing circumstances, and still seeing you praise your God in the midst of those kinds of circumstances. I think that's one of the grandest blessings of the communion of the saints and particularly in being part of a multi-generational church such as this one.

I love here what Andrew Bonar - Andrew Bonar, the Free Church of Scotland minister from the 1800s - he says regarding this verse, "If Sabbaths now are

days of grace to men, what then shall that great Sabbath be? Oh what saints shall be then after ages upon ages spent in the eternal Sabbath in the kingdom, flourishing, fertile, and vigorous?" You see, the Lord is in the business of making His people like this and every Sabbath is another opportunity to look around and to witness and to get a taste of this heavenly power that produces this kind of endurance, even as it's a foretaste and a picture of eternity. A blessing of enduring spiritual health.

The Source of Spiritual Flourishing

And then notice also, what is the source of the spiritual flourishing that he's celebrating here? What is this thing, if we can call it that, that the psalmist desires to get out of worship? Is it some sort of emotional pick-me-up to get him through the week? No, not at all. Look there what he says in verse 15, "To declare that the LORD is upright. He is my rock and there is no unrighteousness in him." Do you see? It is God Himself! That's what he's looking to get out of his worship! My friends, when we come in the assembly of God's people to worship God on His day, we come to commune with Him, we come to praise Him, to sing to Him, to become like Him. We want to hear Him. We gather around His Word to do just that. What we want out of worship is God, God Himself.

Listen, growing up I attended all kinds of different churches and I'm not going to take any cheap shots, but suffice to say they did all manner of silly things, very silly things, sometimes even irresponsible things. Some of them, it seemed as if they were almost going out of their way to avoid proclaiming the Word of God and frankly my soul was starving, and I knew it even then. And so when, by God's grace. I stumbled unknowingly into a PCA church during my college years. I found a group of people who were committed to the idea that you experience God depending on the Biblical means of grace - prayer, fellowship, singing the Word, reading the Word, preaching the Word, and that the central hub of God's people was gathering to worship and experience God in His Word on the Lord's Day. And so from that day forward, my soul was fed like it had never been fed before. Worship was good and it was satisfying and there was genuine spiritual blessing going on in my life even though my circumstances over those next few years were far from peachy. I found, finally, a fellowship of God's people who were seeking to get out of worship God, God Himself, God the Savior, experiencing God.

You see, there is real Gospel here in this little subsection of Psalm 92 because the Gospel is not just simply a get-out-of-jail-free card, is it? It's not simply some kind of fire insurance. Oh, it's so much more. We've said it so many times before at this church, haven't we - God is the Gospel. In the Gospel you get God Himself. And Psalm 92 shows us that here is a day for the glory of God and for the good of man, a day where the Lord says to you, "Clear the decks, clear the tables off, put everything else off to the side and you can have Me all to yourself!" It's a day of incalculable blessing.

IV. A Psalm of the Savior

A psalm of delight, a psalm of doom, a psalm of blessing, and then fourthly, a psalm of the Savior in verses 8 through 11. Look back if you would with me at verses 8 through 11. Here we have Hebrew language, classic Hebrew language, a struggle of battle and of God's covenant faithfulness in giving His servant victory over His enemies. These words could easily have been written by King David or by Moses. In fact, scholars tend to think that one of those two men wrote Psalm 92 - David or Moses. But here in these verses, 8 through 11, we see a very common Biblical theme, a Biblical motif being established - salvation through judgment. It's God's glory in giving salvation to His people through judgment and the destruction of His enemies. From Noah to Moses to Joshua to David to Christ, over and over again throughout redemptive history, throughout the pages of Scripture, we see God giving salvation to His people in this way. And so in many ways this psalm is setting up and pointing us forward to look ahead at another Sabbath victory that was to come.

Do you see there, verse 8 - "But you, O LORD, are on high forever. For behold, your enemies, O LORD, for behold, your enemies shall perish. You have exalted my horn; you have poured over me fresh oil. My eyes have seen the downfall of my enemies." Now friends, can you think of another Sabbath, of a great battle when the enemies of the Lord were scattered, when the servant of the Lord emerged vindicated and victorious? Well of course you can. This Biblical theme here finds its most climactic fulfillment, its most climactic instance, in the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. In Colossians 2:15 Paul says, "Nailing it to the cross, he disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame by triumphing over them." And again Paul says in 2 Timothy 1 verse 10, "Our Savior, Jesus Christ, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel." We sang about that in our opening hymn this evening, didn't we?

From Old Covenant Sabbath to New Covenant Lord's Day

Now I know, perhaps we are stretching the boundaries of a calendar, or blurring the lines perhaps between Saturday and Sunday, between the old covenant Sabbath and the new covenant Lord's Day, but you see, that simply underscores the enormous ramifications that the resurrection of Jesus Christ had and has on the rhythm of life itself. Everything that was a believer's delight and joy about an old covenant Sabbath Saturday now shifts to a Sunday morning. Our Westminster Confession of Faith puts it just like this. "God has particularly appointed one day in seven for a Sabbath to be kept holy unto Him which, from the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ was the last day of the week, and from the resurrection of Christ was changed into the first day of the week, which in Scripture is called the Lord's Day and is to be continued to the

end of the world as the Christian Sabbath."

You see friends, there is real Gospel here as well. Christ who died and was buried but on the first day of the week was raised for our justification, Romans 4 verse 25, and Psalm 92 shows us that here is a day at the crossroads of creation and recreation where we see and get a taste of the power of the ages to come; the triumph of Christ and the rest and salvation for His people. It's a psalm that points us to and tells us of the Savior. It's what a day this is and it's what this day is for.

Application

Now there are any number of applications that we could make here as we move towards the conclusion of our study - how we should prioritize the Lord's Day, even as Orrin prayed for us tonight. I loved that prayer. It's beautiful how God providentially coincides all the elements of the worship service to come together like that. How we could prioritize the Lord's Day and see it at essential for our growth in grace. Or perhaps how we should cherish the Lord's Day as a blessing and as a good gift from our heavenly Father. Or perhaps even more somberly, perhaps we should weep for our friends who really do believe that the fourth commandment has been removed and kicked to the curb and there is no longer a set aside day to experience God in all of His glory as He is among His gathered people. Because you see, if such a thing really were truly cast aside, isn't that a reason to weep? Such a loss.

The Heart of the Matter: The Point of the Lord's Day

But let's think briefly simply on this. Invariably, when this Sabbath issue arises, 99 times out of 100 the conversation devolves into a series of questions. "Yes. but, can I do this? Can I go shopping on the Lord's Day? Is it lawful to go out to a restaurant on the Lord's Day or go to the beach, etc?" A number of months ago I heard a sermon preached from Psalm 92 by another PCA minister and the sermon was absolutely riveting. And in that sermon, the pastor tells a wonderful allegorical story. He says, "Imagine if you will a man and a woman. They meet, they fall in love, and they get married. Well they have a beautiful wedding and off they go to a two weeks, all expenses paid honeymoon to Bermuda - crystal clear waters, palm trees, white sand, absolute paradise. Two weeks later this couple returns and they find their way into the minister's office. And they sit down and she is sitting like this and he is sitting like this and the minister knows that all is not well in paradise and so he asks, 'What happened?' And she says, 'Well do you know that he did nothing but watch football on the television the entire week of our honeymoon!' And he says, 'Well that's not entirely fair! I watched football only because you spent the entire week shopping at the malls the whole week of our honeymoon!' And they both turned to the minister and say, 'Well, is it unlawful to watch football or to go shopping on your honeymoon?' And at this

point the minister buries his face in his hands and shakes his head and breathes a sigh of exasperation and says, 'What are you two doing? Welcome to an exercise in completely missing the point! You two are missing the point altogether. The issue is not whether it's lawful to go watch television or go shopping on your honeymoon. The issue is, it's your honeymoon! Go! Enjoy your new life together! Love your wife, love your husband! What are you doing?"

You see friends, so often we are like the couple in that story. "The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath," says the Lord Jesus. At its heart, the issue is what is the Lord's Day for? You've got a God to enjoy; you've got a Savior to praise. He rose on this day for you! You've got His Word to soak in and feast upon. You've got His ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven people to be with. You've got feasting for your soul all the day long. Don't let it slip by. What a gift your Father has given you!

Perhaps the Puritan George Swinnock best captured the conviction of the psalmist when he wrote this in his meditations on the Lord's Day. He writes, "Hail, thou that art highly favored of God, thou map of heaven, thou golden spot of the week, thou market day of souls, thou daybreak of eternal brightness, thou queen of days. The Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among days. All the graces triumph in thee; all the ordinances conspire to enrich thee. The Father ruleth thee, the Son rose upon thee, the Spirit hath overshadowed thee. On thee light was created, the Holy Ghost descended, life hath been restored, Satan subdued, sin mortified, souls sanctified, the grave, death, and hell conquered. Hail, thou day of days!"

So, do you love the Lord's Day and do you view it as indispensable to your Christian life and to your growth in grace? O my friends, may it be so that we would come to love the Lord's Day more and more and cherish it as a gift and as a God-given means to glorify Him and to enjoy Him forever. Shall we pray?

Our heavenly Father, we thank You for this Your Word and for this day, and we thank You for Yourself and we pray that we would delight in You according to Your Word more than anything else in all the world. This we ask in Jesus' name and for His sake, amen.

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