

Jesus & the Storm

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[0 : 00] The following message is given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee.! For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

Mark chapter 4, look with me in verse 35. Mark chapter 4, verse 35.

On that day, when evening had come, Jesus said to them, let us go across to the other side. And leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. And other boats were with him.

And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling.

[1 : 05] But Jesus was in the stern, asleep on the cushion. And they woke him and said to him, teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?

And he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was great calm.

He said to them, why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?

And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?

Grass withers, the flowers fade, but the word of God abides forever.

[2 : 13] Several years ago, I read a fascinating book called Boys in the Boat. It's about the University of Washington's 1936 varsity rowing team and their race to win gold at the Olympics in Berlin.

Those are quite historic Olympics, if you remember. The book captures all that happened in the boat as the team wins race after race and qualifier after qualifier.

It tells a wonderful story of what's going on in the water, inside the boat. But the real fascination of the story is how it introduces the reader to the boys in the boat.

These boys are of a different breed. They were born in the early 20th century. They were toddlers during the Great War. They were teenagers during the Great Depression of 1929 that crumbled our economy.

They learned to fight every day to survive. They had grit, as they used to say. True grit.

[3 : 24] And they brought it with them in the boat. And as if all the grit that they got before they got into the boat was not enough, they earned more grit or they got more grit. I don't know what you do, earn or get or whatever.

They gained more grit inside the boat. If you know anything about rowing, rowing is this full body movement that pushes your body to extreme exertion.

And they continually pushed one another to the physical limits every day. They pushed day after day in practices. They pushed one another under the beating sun or the shivering cold and the calm seas or the tossing of the storm.

And pushing one another and learning to depend on one another, they gained enough grit to go on to win gold in Berlin. So, spoiler alert, they won.

It happened 85 years ago. Just years before. Actually, they won while Adolf Hitler looked on. Just years before he pushed the whole world into war.

[4 : 26] This morning, we come to another set of boys in a boat. But this story is a bit different. Though it includes some wonderful little details about the boys in the boat.

And though we know a bit about the boys in the boat. We know these are the disciples. We know a bit about them, about their calling. The focus is not on the boys. You know, I've heard this story taught so many times where the focus is on the boys.

It's a storm that falls upon them. And how Jesus calms that storm. And so, the story is often taught. Jesus will calm the storms in your life. And that is true.

But it's not the point of this passage. The focus is not on the boys in the boat. The focus is on the Lord. Who's asleep in the stern of the boat.

Just like every other story in the Gospels, the main point of the story is not, what does this passage mean to me or say to me. Rather, what does this passage say about our Lord Jesus Christ? D.A. Carson says it well in his commentary on the Gospel of John.

[5 : 28] Many preachers are so busy drawing applications for their own congregation that they skip the prior question, what does this passage tell us about Jesus? Although there are many passages in the Gospels that enable a preacher to make direct application to the congregation or to contemporary society, there are still more whose proper application awaits reflection on what the passage says about Jesus.

So, believe it or not, you can read a passage in the Gospel, preach a passage in the Gospel, where the message is not really about our Lord. So, this morning, this is our guiding question. What does this passage say about Jesus Christ?

What does Mark want us to see and to know and to feel about Jesus Christ from these words? And this is not a question that Mark doesn't want us to ask.

It's a question he's pushing us to ask of every passage. Right in the opening verse, he said, this is a Gospel. This is a good news report about Jesus Christ.

And more immediately, this passage marks a transition between the teachings. In the last two weeks, we studied a bunch of parables. And this is a dramatic transition to these string of stories that seek to push us to ask the question, who is this Jesus?

[6 : 48] And if we had another reason, not surprisingly, this passage ends with, who then is this? So, it's not about calming the storms in your life.

It's about something way, way, way better. So, we're going to work it through and hopefully land on a main point of it.

First is the great storm. The great storm. If you notice, there's several repetitions of the word great throughout here.

It's very clear. Mark wants to point something out to us with those repetitions. And so, the great storm. The passage opens with Jesus commanding the disciples there around the Sea of Galilee. He says, he commands them to take me to the other side. Look at verse 35. He says, on that day when he even had come, he said, let us go. It's worded like a suggestion, but it's really a type of command.

[7 : 49] And so, leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat. Now, that's interesting. We'll comment on that later. Mark includes that so that we would get a sense of the eyewitness account of it.

Well, the boat would have been a very typical first century fishing boat. Probably 26 feet long with a mast in the middle and a deck in the front and the back. And so, they load Jesus up into the boat and they make their way across the sea and then a storm arises.

And as you've probably heard or somebody probably taught you in the past, storms were quite common on the Sea of Galilee. The Sea of Galilee was 700 feet below sea level. And just 30 miles to the north or 20 miles to the north was Mount Hermon, which was 9,200 feet above sea level. So, quite a dramatic change in height. I can't think of another word. And as the cold air from the mountains met with or meets with the warm air rising from the sea, storms often occur.

But this storm is unusually intense. Look at verse 37. A great windstorm arose. Waves were breaking into the boat so that the boat was already filling.

[9 : 16] It was a great storm. It was a great storm. The word there is, it could be translated hurricane. It produces waves that crash onto the boat and begin to fill the boat with water.

There are a few things more terrifying than being on the boat in a storm. In ancient cultures, the sea was a symbol of uncontrollable power and unstoppable destruction.

To be caught in the storm is to be stranded and left to the wiles and the waves of this unpredictable power. And so too, without the aid of radar and forecast, these storms are difficult to avoid and claim many life.

All you have to do is read a bit of history and you'll see how hundreds of years ago just the number of people that were lost at sea. And the Sea of Galilee no doubt claimed many.

So much so that Paul uses it as a metaphor in 1 Timothy 2 that many have made shipwreck of their fate. It's only vivid because they've heard of people that have lost their lives.

[10 : 25] And so, in their attempt to get to the other side, the disciples are caught in a storm. Right? One thing we must notice is the only reason the disciples are caught in this great storm is because they do exactly what Jesus says.

The only reason they're caught in a storm is because they do exactly what Jesus says. Jesus says, let us go to the other side. Now you can imagine these guys are fishermen. Perhaps storm clouds are already gathering.

You know, Peter and the boys and, you know, these fishermen turned disciples. Perhaps they were questioning Jesus in their heart, but nevertheless, they obey, they head out into the sea.

As they make their way across, a great storm arises. The first thing we need to see is that this storm did not catch Jesus by surprise. Jesus led them into the storm.

So often, we assume the storms in our lives are when life goes off the rails, when something is wrong, when something is amiss. But here, it's different. The point of this story cannot be that Jesus comes to calm the storms in your life because the very first thing Jesus does in this is create a storm.

[11 : 35] He upholds the whole world with the word of his power and leads them right into it. Did you notice that fascinating back and forth? So, Jesus says, let us go to the other side, leaving the ground.

They took him with them as he was. It's almost like they're saying, Jesus, we're the fishermen here. We'll take you.

So glad you asked. We'll guide you safely across. But it comes very clear that it's Jesus who's in charge.

And he leads them right into the storm. Therefore, the storms in our lives must not be because something is wrong, but because Jesus is working. I'll never forget a season of my life where this truth just came banging down.

my wife, Kim, and I have been married for several months. Our first year of marriage was very hard.

[12 : 41] It revealed a lot of sin in our hearts. After just conflict and anger and impatience and things like that. One particular night was probably the worst.

I forget what we had a conflict about. Isn't that the way it is? You never know. What did this thing start with? You don't even know. But I was furious. I was speaking harshly and angrily with Kim. We had a little wedding gift on the, I don't know, like the table or something. All these green apples, these wooden green apples in a basket.

and I just grabbed them, threw them across the room and these wooden apples broke on the floor.

The picture, I stormed out of the house, went to stick my key in my 1999 Toyota Camry.

I was out of there like I was done. I'll never forget it. As I stuck the key in the ignition, it was as if the Lord said this, said to me, I am with you.

[13 : 58] I am in this. I want to help you. I mean, it was so vivid that God is in the heavens, but he's also right there with me off Magnolia Avenue in Knoxville.

In God's kindness, this reminder humbled me and helped me turn and repent. And this is what God wants you to hear. way before he comes to calm the storms in your life, he's saying, I'm right there in the middle of them.

Might be a tornado. The storms in your life right now haven't come by happenstance or coincidence. They're not random or accidental.

Don't lose heart. They're planned purposefully. The great Puritan John Flavel said, afflictions fall not out of causality, but by counsel.

That's what we think. Just causality. Just these causes having this thing, having this, that bad person did this, and this bad person did this, and it kind of came into my life. Or the weather patterns, the way the air mixes, that's the explanation.

[15 : 03] That's what happens. And what Flavel's saying, what God's Word says, they don't fall that way. They fall by counsel. Everything does the bidding of the Lord.

What difference would it make if you approached the storms in your life with the confidence that they were ordered by the perfect plan of an all-wise God? Point two, the miraculously great calm.

The miraculously great calm. Suddenly, the attention shifts to Jesus and the miracle He performs to make a great calm out of the sea. Look in verse 38a. He says, but He was in the stern.

I love that butt right there. He was asleep on the cushion. Jesus is there. But He's asleep. Almost like Mark captures the jarring nature of it.

All, you know what, is breaking loose, but Jesus is there and He's knocked out. You know, the only time in the Gospel of Mark where our Lord is recorded as sleeping is right here.

[16:14] Now, there's no doubt that He was exhausted from a full day of teaching. That's what just happened on the other side of the sea. But it's hard not to wonder if there's not another reason Jesus went to sleep.

Perhaps like the farmer who sows his seed and goes to sleep, Jesus wanted to show them what trusting God looks like. Perhaps Jesus went to sleep because without Him awake and at the helm, He would see whether the disciples really trust Him.

My guess is a little bit of both. One thing is clear, though, the disciples are not asleep and they are panicked. Now, before we get too far on this, you know, these disciples that are panicking, these guys are skilled fishermen.

This is not you and me out on the sea. I mean, they know the boat. They know the sea. It was their line of work. It was their dad's line of work and it was probably their granddad's line of work and on down the line.

They're not beginners. They're the ones who said, come on, Jesus, we'll take you across. We know how to do this. And yet, they're the ones who panic. They're angry and frustrated.

[17:23] They wake up Jesus and rebuke Him. Look in 38b. They woke Him and said to Him, Teacher, do you not care that we're perishing? Their question seems innocent enough in English, but another translation could be, you don't care if we drown, do you?

You don't even care, Mom, you know, do you? I mean, you know how those questions work. I mean, in the original language, there's a no there.

It implies a no answer. It's not a question of discovery. It's an assumption of motive. Now, Matthew softens this question to a prayer.

Luke, to a plea for help, but in Mark, it's a rebuke. Jesus may have led the disciples into the storm, and He may have good reasons for doing it, but these disciples are not getting it. Just like the Israelites before them, they're saying, hey, what's going on?

Did you bring us out here to let us die? Don't you care what happens to us? Now, how does Jesus respond? He responds with incredible compassion.

[18:40] The first expression of Jesus' compassion, though, is not calming the storm. The first expression is choosing not to rebuke them. They were angry.

They accused their Maker of not caring for them, their Messiah of not watching over them. Their red face in anger pointing at the Lord, saying, it's all your fault.

But amazingly, Jesus doesn't rebuke them. I've been spending a lot of time in prayers of lament and in the book of Job lately.

And if you spend some time in our friend Job's book, you'll notice that it's just loaded with prayers of frustration and anger. Many people misread the book of Job because his friends seem to be the ones that are more balanced and more godly.

And he seems to pray in anger and frustration the whole time. But it's led me to wonder, like, why are these prayers in the Bible? Have you ever wondered that?

[19:49] Like, why are these prayers? How long, oh Lord, will you forget me? Psalm 13. Psalm 88, never lifts the nose. Just straight trouble.

What are they meant to teach us? Why are these prayers in the Bible? Why is this rebuke of our Lord in the Bible without a return rebuke? Now, they're not in the Bible to tell us it's okay to be mad at God.

People will say that. But it's not okay. It's not okay to tell God how you really feel. That's not the point of these prayers.

Even if you're frustrated and angry, trust me, God does not need any help to know how you feel. So why? Why these prayers?

Why this blunt rebuke? To show us God's compassion and understanding. Look, Derek Kidner says this about the Psalms, which is incredible. He says, the very presence of these prayers in Scripture is a witness to God's understanding.

[20:52] God knows how men speak when they're desperate. Now, that is incredible. If you just think moments of Scripture like this are permitting us to say what we really feel, then we're missing

the much larger and greater point.

The point and the reason they're in the Bible is that God astonishingly doesn't snap them right then. The Bible could have included so many prayers that everything was said in the right way and postured in the right way or the right tone and all these type things, but the Bible does not include those types or not only include those types of prayers.

Why? To show us God is a God of understanding, compassion, and grace. Jesus led them into the storm, but even though they don't believe He could have good reasons for it and boil over in frustration and anger, He doesn't rebuke them.

He shows them compassion and grace and understanding. And that's wonderful news. I read a book years ago by a Puritan named Thomas Goodwin and he wrote this book.

So, you know, you read through the Gospel and you're like, holy cow, Jesus is the real thing. He's amazing. He's compassionate. He's kind. He's understanding. And Thomas Goodwin wrote this book called *The Heart of Christ in Heaven Towards Sinners on Earth*.

[22 : 05] What he's trying to argue is that that same Christ is totally amazing and so compassionate, so understanding. He's still the same one in heaven. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

And so we can take courage from these verses that even in the desperation and the things that boil over that should strike us down. The Lord is compassionate and understanding, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.

J.C. Ryle says it like this, Let us leave these verses with the comfortable recollection that Jesus is not changed. And he's commenting on these very verses that we're reading.

His heart is still the same that it was when he crossed the Sea of Galilee instilled the storm. High in heaven at the right hand of God, Jesus is still sympathizing, still almighty, still pitiful.

That means full of pity and compassion and patient towards his people. He doesn't rebuke them.

[23 : 19] Maybe your biggest problem with Jesus Christ is a misconception of who he is. That he's this killjoy up in heaven trying to stop anybody from having a good time, watching your every move.

No. He doesn't want you to miss the forest for the trees. He wants you to see the overwhelming compassion he has. But Jesus does rebuke the waves.

Look at verse 39. And he awoke. It's so simple and vivid. Compact. He awoke. And rebuked the wind.

Said to the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased and there was great, there it is again, calm. I don't know if you've ever heard the story of the 11th century Danish king, King Canute.

The story goes that his lackeys were surrounding him, you know, it was like yes men surrounding him, just praising him, saying, You're just totally great. You're awesome. And he came back to him, says, Am I like God?

[24 : 32] And he walks to the sea and says, Stop! And the waves keep coming in as if to proclaim to those people only God can stop the sea.

I might be great, but I'm not God. But Jesus says, Peace, be still. And the sea buckles down like an obedient child, like those unclean spirits that he's been casting out all through the book of Mark.

And they just run to our Lord and they fall on their knees immediately. Jesus doesn't recite a prayer.

He doesn't call on a higher power. He doesn't cry out in the name of God for help. Jesus merely speaks a word, just like the word he did at creation. No doubt, the disciples began to wonder, Who is this?

Who in the world is this? Point three, the great fear of the disciples. The great fear of the disciples.

[25 : 41] The calming of the storm doesn't erase the disciples' fear, it increases it. Now, did you notice that this miracle, and I'm sure you did, is just for the disciples.

They take him into the boat. They wake him up when the storm hits. They are there when he calms the storm. There's something they saw that no one else saw. And the only reason we're reading it is because Peter has, Mark is writing Peter's account of what happened in that boat.

But it was just for them. The crowds were not around like so many of the other miracles. But look at their response. And we begin to wonder why he does this. Verse 40, he says to them, Why are you so afraid?

Have you still no faith? And they were filled with great fear. So there was a great storm, and there was a great calm, and now there's great fear.

The fear increases in the hearts of the disciples. Really, literally, they were fearing with great fear. Their heart was just a fury of fear.

[26 : 46] But why? I think behind Jesus' question is a rebuke. Why are you afraid? I think Jesus is saying, you assume I don't allow people I love to go through storms.

You assume that you're just left alone to the unruly ways of the sea. But you should have known better. You are my disciple.

You have no reason to panic. You should have been calm. You should have trusted me. Have you no faith? Where is your faith? Here's what he's saying.

He said, this moment, disciples realized they had Jesus all wrong. They assumed that he didn't care when he led them in the storm. And we can do the same thing.

We can assume God doesn't care. That he's mad at us when we go through something like this. But often our anger reveals kind of a confidence in what God can do and how he might be at work.

[27 : 57] Tim Keller says it like this, if you have a God great enough and powerful enough to be mad at because he doesn't stop your suffering, you also have a God who's great enough and powerful enough to have reasons you can't understand.

That's essentially what the disciples came up against is that it was beyond their understanding how God could be, how Jesus could call them into this storm and have reasons for it. And so, they should remain calm.

He was rebuking them. You should have been calm. You should have known better. You should have been patient. And so, they're fearing with great fear. You know, if Jesus is rebuking them for not believing there's reasons in the midst of a storm, Jesus is also teaching them the underlying truth that he's in absolute control of the storm.

So, if he's rebuking them because they didn't believe there were reasons in the storm, he's also teaching them the underlying truth that he is completely a sovereign over the storm.

John Flavel again says it like this, a lion at liberty is terrible to meet, but who is afraid of the lion in the keeper's hands? Yeah, we could say it this way, a sea at liberty is terrible to meet, but who is afraid of the sea in the Lord's hand?

[29 : 07] That's what is coming to them in this moment that they're fearing with great fear because suddenly they realize it's not the sea that they should fear. It's not the sea that's uncontrollable, unstoppable.

It is the Lord. The sea is on the Lord's leash just like everything else in all creations. All things do his bidding and it all sets in.

This Jesus is not a teacher. This Jesus is not a man from God. It's not another prophet. This Jesus is the Lord. He is the Lord, the Lord, the ruler of all, the one who holds up to all things according to his power.

And so they ask, who then is this that even the wind and the seas obey him? My imagination is their minds are filled with scriptures like Job 38, 11.

Who said, who said it, thus far you come and no further and here shall your proud waves be stayed? Who said it, I mean Psalm 65, by awesome deeds you answer us with righteousness, O God of our salvation, the hope of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest seas, the one who by his strength established the mountains being girded with mountains.

[30 : 24] Who stills the roaring of the seas, the roaring of the waves? It's all crystallizing in their mind. It is the Lord alone who they must fear and so there is no doubt the fear increases because they're fearing the most fearful one of all.

The one who's on their side nonetheless. But the one who will not be on their leash.

Reminds me of Lucy again. Is he safe? The lion, the witch, and the wardrobe talking about Aslan. No. No, he's not safe.

But he's good. Jesus is saying don't fall for lesser fears. Don't fear the economy.

Don't fear what a man in Washington can do to you. Don't even fear the devil himself. He's my devil. I'm the Lord is what he's saying.

[31 : 36] Do not fear. In a word, this is the main point. Do not fear. Jesus rules over all things. You must fear and follow him alone. Do not fear.

Jesus rules over all things. You must fear and follow him alone. wonderfully, it seems that the disciples got this.

Now, I know they did like us, had a few more bumps, but if you remember in Acts 12, which we studied a couple years ago, when Peter's in prison, what's he doing?

Sleeping. That's amazing. Victor Hugo said, God is awake.

Go to sleep. God is awake. life. but that's not all. This story seems to be, or is, carefully aligned with the book of Jonah, which we also studied a couple of years ago.

[33 : 00] If you remember, like Jonah, Jesus is on the boat with several boys. Like Jonah, the boat Jesus is on encounters a great storm.

Like Jonah, the sailors find Jesus sleeping in the boat. It's as if Mark is whispering to us, someone greater than Jonah is here.

But listen, unlike Jonah, Jesus is not sleeping in disobedience. He's not on the run.

He's not sleeping because he doesn't care. He's sleeping in perfect obedience to the Father. He's showing us what trusting God looks like.

More than that, Jesus is sleeping for you. You. He's without sin.

[34 : 07] He was born under the law and was obedient to the law. He was without sin, not even sinful fear.

But also, unlike Jesus, unlike Jonah, Jesus is not thrown into the sea to calm the sea. He stills the sea with a word.

But I don't think that's where the parallel ends. Seems to me, Mark purposefully leaves this parallel unfinished.

Because in order to rescue us from the punishment that we deserve, Jesus will not be able to speak a word. Jesus must be thrown out into the storm that we are destined to face.

The storm of sin and death. The storm of wrath for sins we have committed. It will not be enough to speak a word. He must go all the way down to satisfy the fury of God's wrath and set us free forever.

[35 : 13] That's what Isaiah 53 is all about. That Brian read for us this morning. All we like sheep have gone astray. The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. The Bible comes together in so many ways.

That Jesus Christ is not a man from God sent to tell us things about God. But Jesus Christ is one who comes to stand in the place that we are meant to stand. All the sacrifices come together.

All the stories come together that Jesus Christ didn't just come to teach. Jesus Christ did not just come to heal. Jesus Christ did not come to perform miracles. Jesus Christ came to go all the way down to stand in the place of guilty sinners and righteous for the unrighteous that he might bring us to God by satisfying, by being a propitiation for the wrath of God so that the wrath of God might be exhausted on him and not on us.

Amen. That's right. So if you want to come to Jesus today's the day of salvation.

There may be no better modern picture of this than the final scene of the movie Endgame. The Avengers and I only watch these things because I'm pressured by my kids.

[36 : 45] The Avengers are trying to stop Thanos the wicked man from getting all the infinity stones and wiping out half of the universe's population.

All the Avengers are a symbol for the fight. That is what's kind of cool about this one. They're all there and you know, Captain America's not fighting Iron Man. That was a dumb one.

They're all there. They're all on the same team. They're all trying to help one another out and they're a symbol to fight and everyone you can imagine is there. Thanos is trying to get all the infinity stones into his gauntlet glove.

Now I've got to get this stuff right because I don't know what I'm talking about. But he's trying to get them into this gauntlet glove. If he gets them and snaps his fingers, he wins. Just as simple as that. In the end, knowing their chances, slipping away as Thanos gathers the stone, Iron Man rushes towards Thanos. Before he is punched away, he pulls off the glove from Thanos.

[37 : 47] So Thanos is this massive guy that just takes out everybody in his way and Iron Man just grabs the glove off and Thanos tries to snap his fingers but it's no use. He doesn't have the glove anymore.

Iron Man has the glove. He takes the glove with all the infinity stones in it. He knows that if he unleashes this power, this power will kill him too.

He snaps his fingers and does it anyway. He destroys Thanos and all his cronies. He rescues the world by offering himself.

Iron Man stumbles forward and collapses, dying before the Avengers' eyes. Spider-Man says, Mr. Stark, can you hear me?

It's Peter! It's Peter! Crying at the Avengers. What the heck? Yeah, you got a problem.

[38 : 54] It's Peter, Mr. Stark. We won, Mr. Stark. We won and you did it, sir. You did it! His girl, Pepper Potts, says, Tony, look at me.

They share this long look. We're going to be okay. You can rest now. That's what every man wants to hear.

It won't be enough for Jesus to still the storm with a word. He's going down further than Jonah ever did.

Jesus is a true and better Jonah who obeys the Lord perfectly and is thrown out into the storm to still the roarings of the storm forever and ever. Don't fear what the world fears.

Fear the Lord. Follow Him and worship Him. Father in heaven, humble ourselves before you. We cast ourselves upon you.

[40 : 04] Lord, we thank you for your word. Lord, may it go forward. We offer our hearts to you promptly and sincerely. Oh, Lord, search us and know us.

See if there's any unclean way in us. Lead us in the way everlasting. Lord, we lay our lives, our hearts, our affections that you would do that which is pleasing in your sight in us.

Lord, cultivate in us the fear of the Lord. Not this desperate fear that you're going to strike us down any moment, but the comforting fear of having God as your friend.

You are with us and you'll never leave us or forsake us. We trust you. We follow you. We lean on you. In Jesus' name. Amen. You've been listening to a message given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee.

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