The Church and the Apostolic Teaching

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[0:00] The word of God is living and active. Father, thank you that you are the living God and that you're here with us and that you speak to us, that you speak with words that are active, words of power and life and grace and love.

So please, would you speak to each of our hearts today? Speak through your word as it is read and then help me to say words that are useful, that are from you. Would we remember what is from you and forget what is not from you? But please, would you come away changed and encouraged in having met you? In Jesus name we pray. Amen.
Amen. And Betty. Today's scripture reading comes from Acts chapter 2. Please follow along in your bulletins or follow the screen.
And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And all came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.
And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all as any had need.
[1:19] And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people.

And the Lord added to their number day by day, those who were being saved. This is the word of the Lord. Thank you, Betty.
That's quite a short passage. You may wonder, didn't we preach on this a couple of weeks ago? I'll get to that in a moment. We're going to have a, yeah, we're going to dive into this little passage over the next four weeks.
But first, do you guys know what a silver bullet is? I know, not everyone here, English is a first language. It comes from kind of folk's tales.
How do you kill werewolves? I don't know if you know how werewolves don't exist. But you know, how do you kill them? With a silver bullet. I guess with vampires, it's a stake through the heart. But a silver bullet.
[2:18] The werewolves, they're unkillable. But if you have a silver bullet, it's done. And it's become this expression in the English language for like a simple, effective solution to a complex problem, right?

Maybe there's something at work. And you have no idea how the company can best run. But if you just, there's one single solution. And that solves everything. That's a silver bullet. Maybe you have a young baby.
And, you know, whatever you do, you can't make it stop crying. Whether there's one single solution. And that solves everything. That's the idea. A silver bullet, if that makes sense. And I guess most of us want that, right?
If we're Christians, is there a silver bullet for the Christian life? You know, we want to meet with God. We want to grow in love and holiness. We want to have power for Christian living.
We want to see the world rightly. We want to witness. Is there one thing that if you just get that one thing and that solves everything? Wouldn't that be great, right? Isn't that what we want? Well, the good news from today's sermon is that there is something like that.
[3:24] That is one thing that, yeah, if we have that, that is, in a way, that solves everything. And that's a wonderful thing. And that's not just for Christians. Maybe you're here. You're visiting.

You're not a Christian. Well, maybe if you understand why we think this is so important, it will explain so much about our church, about our CGs, about being a Christian.

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I hope this is very helpful for you as you maybe think about what it means to be a Christian. And that's where we're going. Now, for context, yeah, for this July, we're having this little series that flows out of the book of Acts.
Over the past few weeks, we've been in Acts and, you know, seeing the early church. And in there, there were these little cameos where we just get a snapshot of the early church, right?
The Holy Spirit came down and there was the church. And we saw just how wonderful that was, right? Well, why did Luke include that? Well, partly to make us just praise God, right?
[4:22] Wow, what a beautiful thing that God has done, right? The Old Testament was such a mess. And now the Spirit comes and God made the church. And wow, it's so beautiful. Praise God for what he's doing.

But also, it's there a little bit as a checklist, right? For us to think, okay, hey, we want to be a church. What should we be doing? What should we be like? Well, let's look at these cameos.
Let's look at this little passage. What are the things that that first church did? What did it look like? And then maybe we should look like the same. And so the four weeks we're going to do that. Today, we're going to look at scripture.
And they were devoted themselves to the apostles teaching. We're going to talk about their relationship with God, worship, their fellowship and love and prayer. Those four things are we going to look at the coming four weeks.
And today, yeah, the word. So that's what we're going to talk about. That is the silver bullet. And so first, yeah, I want to talk about the primacy of the word. The word is primary.
[5:21] It's the thing that comes first, right? That's how the passage starts. We read Acts chapter 2, verse 42. And they devoted themselves to the apostles teaching.

3,000 people had just become Christians on the day of Pentecost. And they went to church. What did they do? They devoted themselves to the apostles teaching. They came eager to learn, eager to grow.
They wanted to every day hear that teaching and learn. That's what they were doing. And it must be important because Luke mentions it first, right? The very first, you know, if you make a list, you think what comes first.
And, okay, the apostles teaching. This is what they wanted. And there's also another reason why I think this comes first. Why actually, why is the word so foundational?
Well, here's a Christian on the screen. And here are the four weeks of this series. Scripture, worship, love, witness. Now, let's think about inputs and outputs.
[6:23] What are these four things? Well, three of them, in a way, are outputs, right? They're things that we do. We worship. We love. We witness. But scripture is different. Scripture is an input, right?

Scripture is something that we receive, that comes to us. And the other three flow out of us. And the thing is, inputs come first, right? If you get a new phone, the first thing you have to do is charge it. Otherwise, it won't do anything. It's the same with a Christian, in a way, right? There's something that goes in, and then other things come out in a process kind of way. All right?
The words. This church had devoted themselves to the apostles teaching. Because there's something foundational and primary about this input of the word. And I think, you know, we've just been a few weeks in Acts.
I hope you see how important the word is in Acts, right? Last week, I mentioned these summary statements. So, the book of Acts is divided into four parts, and each part ends with a statement.
[7:23] And they all go something like this. And the word of God continued to increase. And the word of God increased and multiplied. And the word of God increased and prevailed mightily. It's all about the word.

Right? If Luke summarizes, okay, hey, these seven chapters, what have we seen? Well, the word of God increased. So, clearly, it's very important. I wanted to just give a list of all these verses in the rest of Acts.
But it was so boring and repetitive, right? And they preached the word. And they preached the word. And people received the word. And people, and they taught the word. And they examined the word. And, you know, on and on and on.
Just take a highlighter. Go through your Bible. Go through your Bible. Underline every occurrence of the word. Of the Lord. The word of God. The word. And see how much it is. And, yeah. What is

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the book of Acts about?
In a way, it's about the progress of the word. And I think, in a way, I'm preaching to the choir. I think most of us know, okay, we make the word important.
[8:21] Right? It's a big part of our Sunday service. We do it in our CGs. You know, we have a Bible reading plan. We want you to read the Bible. And yet, are we really convinced that this is so important?

Maybe you're here as a youth. And your parents always insist that you read the Bible. And you kind of, why is this so important? So, I want to take this moment. I mean, I'm not just going to preach on five words.
Let's look at the Bible. Why is this actually so important? Because if we know why it's so important, I think that will help us. Hey, why should we be devoted to the words like they were?
Now, what is so special about the word? Let me give a few reasons. And the first one, it's maybe obvious, but why does Luke say the apostles teaching?
Why doesn't he just say, hey, and they devoted themselves to scripture. And they devoted themselves to the words. Why the apostles teaching? Well, it's not just that the apostles were kind of the Bible teachers in the church then, right?
[9:25] What is it about the apostles? Well, it's about the truth about Jesus. The word is the truth about Jesus. I mean, who are the apostles? What did Jesus appoint them for?

Well, Acts 1 verse 8, you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in Judea and Samaria and all the ends of the earth. They're going to be his witnesses. End of chapter 1, they need a new apostle. Okay, what kind of guy do we need? Do we need someone who understands the scriptures well? I mean, maybe that helps, but the big criterion. Next slide. All right.
Second quote, right? Who do we need? Well, one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us, one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection.
Right? Apostles need to have been with Jesus from the whole time. They need to have seen his ministry. They need to have met him. They need to, you know, be there for his resurrection. And, right?
[10:28] The apostles were witnesses to Jesus. And so the apostles' teaching is a way of saying, you know, they needed the truth about Jesus. Right? Because, of course, it's Jesus who saves us.

It's Jesus, what he did for us on the cross in his resurrection. That is what we need. That's the gospel. So, in a way, he could have said they were devoted to the gospel. But I think with apostles' teaching, he gets through that, hey, they were devoted to learning it, to growing in it, to hearing it. Right? Not just they were devoted to the gospel like in their own minds or anything, even though I'm sure they were. Right? Does that make sense? They needed the gospel. But where do you find it? Well, from the authorized witnesses, from the people who Jesus appointed to know the gospel and to teach the gospel.
Now, for us, of course, we don't have apostles anymore. Elders are not apostles. I haven't met Jesus in the flesh. I wasn't there with his resurrection, etc.
No. We have, of course, the apostles' teaching in the New Testament. Right? That was written by the apostles in a way that is it for us. So, I guess certainly we should be devoted to the New Testament.
[11:38] But then how about the Old Testament? That's always the question, right? If it's about Jesus, should we still need the Old Testament? Well, of course. Right? You read what the apostles actually preach in the book of Acts.

And they constantly preach the Old Testament. They thought it was still relevant. And actually, what does Jesus say the Old Testament is about? Right? He says it's about him.
In the prequel to Acts, basically, Acts chapter 0, this is what Jesus said to the apostles. Then he said to them, These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.
Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, the Old Testament, and said to them, Thus it is written that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.

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Right? The Old Testament is about the gospel. It's about Jesus. If you were here a year ago, we did a Bible overview. We went through the whole storyline of the Bible. I hope if you were here, you remember that.
[12:46] You've seen it. So it is about the truth about Jesus. And yet, there's more than that. Because that can sound like a message, like information.

Like, okay, this is really precious, important, 100% true information that we need. And yet, it's so much more.
And the word is so much more. As we prayed earlier, as the Bible says, it's living and active. Of course, those two things are a bit related, right? You don't have something that is dead and active. Or living and passive. No, of course, living and active go together. But the word of God, it isn't just dead information, dry information. It's living. It's, look again at those statements about the word, right?
That we saw. You know, the word of God increased and multiplied. The word of God prevailed mightily. It's like the word itself is doing something.
[13:47] That's how Luke writes about it. The word is, it's powerful. It does something. Here is one of my favorite verses from Acts. Paul, the apostle, in chapter 20, he gives a farewell speech to the elders of Ephesus, the church where he was for three years.

And what does he say? Now, okay, another slide. Now, I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among those who are sanctified.
I'll be gone, but you've got God and the word. And the word is able to build you up. The word is the thing that will save you. He really thinks the word is, it's not just information.
It actually does something. Right? And it's worth pausing there. And here's where we're kind of going to leave Acts and a bit of a topical sermon. You know, I want us to really be convinced of this. These are really important truths about the word. It is living and active. What does that mean? Two things. Well, active. God works through his word. Everything God does, he does by speaking through his word.
[14:59] I don't know if you ever noticed that when you read the Bible, but that's what he does. Right? I mean, start at the beginning. Creation. How does God create the world? He speaks.

Right? Let there be light. And there was light. Or as the Psalm 33 puts it, by the word of the Lord, the heavens were made. Right? By the word of the Lord. How does Jesus sustain the whole universe?
Right? Jesus is sustaining the whole universe, making sure it doesn't fall apart. How does he do that? Hebrews 1. He upholds the universe by the words of his power.
Right? How does God save people? Psalm 107. He sends out his words and healed them and delivered them from their destruction. How are we born again? 1 Peter. You have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God.
Right? It's always the words. How does Jesus go around healing? Right? You've read the gospels. How does Jesus heal people? He speaks. Right? He says, be opened and get up.
[16:04] And the demon has left. And those kind of things. He speaks. And it happens. Right? He speaks. End of time. Jesus is going to raise 10 billion people from the dead in one go.

How is he going to do that? Well, John 5. An hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out. Jesus is just going to speak and raise 10 billion people from the dead. His word is powerful. His word is powerful. His word is powerful. Right? Everything Jesus does. Everything God does is through the word. You know, images. The word is the sword of the spirit. A sword is not something you just hang on the wall and look at. Right? Swords are for doing stuff. It's like a hammer in Jeremiah. Hammers are tools for doing stuff. It's a fire. Fire melts and purifies. It does stuff. God works through his word. Right? So, we want God to work. We need the word. And, of course, why does God work through his word?
[17:01] Well, the second thing, living. God is present through his word. You know, in the Bible, where the word is, that's where God is. That's what people learned in the Old Testament, right?

In the Exodus, they didn't see anything, but they heard a voice. How was God with them? Well, through a voice. They had a temple. And, normally, in a temple, there's a statue, right?
You go here to a Buddhist temple. There's statues. The statue is kind of where the God is. What was at the heart of the temple of the Jews? The Ten Commandments. His word.

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It was like he was present through his words. Or, we talked about Abraham. These verses seem a bit weird, right? So, and behold, the word of the Lord came to Abraham.
This man shall not be your heir. Your very own son shall be your heir. And he brought him outside and said, look towards heaven. And we read that the word of the Lord came to him.
[17:57] Like he got a text message or an email or something, right? No. The Lord was there. Because in the next verse, he takes him outside, right? Where the word is, that's where God is.

And, ultimately, of course, fulfilled in Jesus, right? The word became flesh and dwelt among us. And we've seen his glory. And the word is God's presence with us.
Yeah? That's something important. You know, God is where the word is. That's where God is. Now, you may wonder, how about the spirit? Isn't God present by the spirit? Yes, of course.
The thing is, they go together. The word and the spirit go together, right? Again, Psalm 33, that verse, the second half, right? By the word of the Lord, the heavens were made. By the breath of his mouth, all their hosts.
By the spirit of his mouth. Jesus in John 6, the words I speak to you are spirit and life. His words are spirit. The Thessalonians, Paul writes, our gospel came to you not only in words, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit.
[18:59] And with full conviction. They go together. I guess, remember, spirit means breath, right? And words and breath go together. And it's a common illustration, but it's so powerful, right?

Can you speak without exhaling? Right? Can you speak without breath? You can't. Words without breath is nothing. At the same time, breath without words is also not much, right?
If I'm going to have a date with my wife and the whole evening, I just, It's not very meaningful. No. Words and breath go together.
Words and spirit go together. It's the same with God, right? I mean, look at the early, yeah? So, yeah, we need both. They go together. And we often don't think that.
And sometimes you meet Christians and they say, oh, we don't need the word. We have the spirit. And just like the early church. Well, here is the early church. What did they do? Did they just sit around listening to the spirit?
[19:54] No. They devoted themselves to the apostles teaching, right? Clearly, they needed the word still. You know, when the apostles, when there were too many hungry widows, did they say, oh, we will take care of the widows.

They have the spirit to guide them into all truth. No. Right? He says, hey, we can't neglect the preaching of the word. Clearly, we need the word and the spirit. They go together. But I hope you get the point, right?
These reasons. The word is living and active. It's something I'm very passionate about, as I hope you see. You know, people were devoted to the word. Because, yeah, it's a life-changing message of Jesus.
But it's more than that. It's God's powerful presence. And so, what does it look like if we believe this? To be devoted to scripture.
Well, I guess we want the word to be central, right? You know, we're meeting here on Sundays. Do you want God to be here present with us? Yeah, right? Do we want God to be at work today?
[20:52] Yes. Well, then the Bible says we need the word. Because that is how God works. And that is how God is present, right? That's how you meet him. Yes, that's why we emphasize the sermon.

I hope you see that, right? If the word is really God's powerful presence, we need it. Of course, we meet him through the whole service. But, of course, based on the word, right? I mean, singing.
Of course, we meet God when singing. But the power is not in the singing, right? If we sing Coldplay or Katy Perry, do you meet God? No. Right? You meet God through words full of the gospel, full of biblical truth, right?
So, it's still the word. That's the power behind the songs we sing. It's about the word. CG. Do you want God to be at work in your CG? You know, when you meet on Thursday in that living room, do you want God to be there?
Open up the word. Dig into it. You know, listen to what God is saying together, right? That's how God does his work. Again, it's not the only thing, right?
[21:54] The church was devoted to scripture and fellowship and breaking of bread and prayer. You need to do all those things. But no input, no output, right? There needs to be the word.

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Personally, you know, you want to meet with God each day? You want to keep your relationship with God going? Well, where can you meet him? In the word. Right? That's how we meet God. That's how he is at work in us. That's what the Bible says. Which is why we have a Bible reading plan. Why we encourage people to every day read the Bible. Of course, not just reading.
Right? It is a relationship. Right? Reading is not just like you read and then you close the Bible. Like, again, if I have a date with my wife and she says all kinds of things and then I just, I've listened and then I stop.
No, no. Of course, I process. I think about what she says and I talk back to her. Right? So, reading plus meditation plus prayer. That's how you have a quiet time. It's not just reading.
[22:51] It's, you know, it's a relationship. But the word is a big part of it. In our outreach. How are people going to hear about Jesus unless we tell them about Jesus?

In your family. How are your kids going to know Jesus unless you bring them the word about Jesus? How can they meet him without the word? Yeah. I hope you see, right, what I'm trying to say.
Right? If the Bible, if the word is really as powerful as it is, as important as it is, because that's where we meet Jesus. Well, that's what we need. And so, I think, yeah, it really is in some ways the silver bullet.
Right? In everything we do, we need the silver bullet of the word. The only thing is, it's not a bullet. What is the thing about bullets? Bullets, they kill instantly.
Right? That's the thing about bullets. They're quick. The word of God is not quick. You know, what is the small round thing that the Bible is compared to? Well, a seed.
[23:53] And seeds, they take time to grow. You can't just watch the seed and see it grow. It takes time. Yeah? So, we use the word. We preach it. We study it. We read it.

And then we just trust the process. We trust that it will do its work slowly over time. Like when the doctor gives you a medicine and says, okay, you've got this terrible disease.
If you just take this every day for six months, that will solve it. I mean, taking it once doesn't do much. You won't notice the difference. Right? But if you take it for six months, hey, it will cure you. And it's the same thing here. If we just receive the word regularly, consistently, it will grow us. We will get to know God better and better.
We'll meet him every day. We'll become more loving and more holy. And we'll have power. And we'll witness. And everything. Everything flows from this. So, yeah.
[24:50] So, it needs to be central. And I guess second, we need to respond appropriately. Right? We hear the word, but we need to respond. And again, remember, the word is God's powerful presence with us.

The things we don't often treat it like that. Right? We were all worried about the economy and the world and everything. And imagine that Jesus shows up here in his resurrected glory.
Right? We can't even see him because he's so bright. And he says, hey, don't be anxious. Don't fear. I've got it all under control. Would you believe him? My guess is we would.
Right? Well, the Bible is no different. This is God's powerful word. This is how God is with us. We should, in a way, treat it the same. Right?
We should treat it exactly as if God was here in person. Because he is. The thing is, we don't. Right? We just take the Bible and it's nice, but we don't really believe it.
[25:47] And we keep going. With our fears and our doubts. But, in a way, if we really treat the word as what it is, we should. Right? We should respond to that. God is really here.

Right? I mean, it's a challenge for me. Right? For all of us. What does that look like? We have a series blurb on the website. It talks about submission. I think that's a good word. I guess partly you would believe the truth.
Right? If the Bible says something, you will believe it. I mean, if God was here and told you something, you would believe it. I guess if the Bible says it, we will believe it.
Even if it's hard to understand. Even if the world thinks it's different. Right? If how human beings are made. And what we are like. What the world is like. We can believe the truth.
We can trust the promise. The Bible is full of wonderful promises. And, again, if God was here making that promise, I guess you'd believe it. Well, the word is the same thing.
[26:48] Right? God doesn't lie. God is faithful. As we sung so much this morning. Which means you can trust the promises of scripture. Right? So maybe tomorrow, you know, you're in this really

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difficult situation.

And you don't really know what to do or what's going to happen. And then you remember this verse. That is not just you remembering information. The word is God's presence.
That is God being with you. And speaking comfort to your heart. Isn't that a wonderful thing? That's how you should see that. Right? God speaking to your heart. Being there with you in this difficult situation.
And bringing the comfort and encouragement that you need. It's wonderful. The word is wonderful. Of course. And we need to understand it. Right?
That's a whole different talk. We need to interpret the Bible. Sometimes there's things in the Bible. Well, that's not about us. That's. There's a storyline in the Bible. We need to interpret it correctly. It's from a different culture.
[27:46] But when this is really true. When we know this is for us. You know, hold on to these promises. Right? It's wonderful. And God is reliable. He's given us a word that helps.

That is really what we need. And thirdly, of course, it means we act on what God says. Right? If God tells you to do something. Again, if Jesus was here.
And he said, hey, you should reconcile with that family member. My guess is you would get up and do that. You wouldn't. Okay. Well, maybe next week. I'll think of whether I should do that or not. Right? You would respond. Again. That is how we should treat the word. I think for me. Yeah. Again, it's easy to postpone it.
Think of the difference between a phone call and an email. Right? An email that's kind of in your inbox. And yeah, I'll get around to it one day. A phone call is very direct.
[28:41] Treat the Bible as a phone call. Right? When you open the Bible, God is on the phone. And he's speaking to you directly. It's not an email that you just leave in your inbox. Does that make sense?

Yeah. I hope that I find this helpful. But just as we close, of course, this is still not easy. I mean, life is full here in Hong Kong.
Life is a struggle. And actually, there's so much wrong with my life, with most of our lives, that when you meet God, there's so much that needs to change.
And it's going to feel like a burden. And which is what I finally, I want to come back to this idea. This is God's presence. You know, you are meeting not words. You're meeting a person.
And words make sense in the context of a person that you know. But you may wonder, why is it the word of the Lord, not the words? Well, because it's a unified whole. Because we're meeting a person.
[29:39] And the person determines the words. Someone who says, can you make a cup of tea for me? Is that a stranger on the street? Is that your boss?

Is that your spouse? Makes a huge difference, right? It's the person that gives the context for the words. And as we read the word of God, again, we are meeting a person. And that's the context.
And how is the word described? Again, some verses from Acts, right? God says, go and stand in a temple and speak to the people all the words of this life.
These are words of life. Acts 20. I commend you to God and to the word of his grace. The Bible is the words of grace and life. Why?
Because they're the words of Jesus, who is the life. Who is the one who relates to us, first of all, by grace. Right? The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God, etc.
[30:35] Right? We meet the God of grace and life. The one who died for us. The one who forgave us. That's the person you meet. And every word comes from him. And that makes it different, right?

That is the one we want to know deeply. The one we want to listen to. The one we want to follow. The one I want to learn from. The one we want to be with. And if we know that, well, let's see the word.
If we see the word really as that is, then I hope we want to do this, right? We want to be devoted to the gospel. To the word. So why don't we think about this?
Let me just give you half a minute. Just think, well, what is, you know, God is here. He's speaking. What is he speaking to your heart right now? Think about that for 30 seconds.
Respond. Talk back in prayer. And then I will pray. And then we're going to keep singing. Amen. Yes.

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[31:53] let's pray together our father we thank you for these things we we've considered we we don't deserve your words the people we are the things we've done we deserve you to never talk to us again and yet you gave us your word and it's not just a message you are here with us by your spirit through your word speaking to our hearts speaking words of grace and life father would we treasure that would we see your word as yeah what it really is the living and active word of god your powerful presence that we want to meet with you and whenever we gather whenever we're alone to just treasure your words so that we we know your presence and we know you your comfort your encouragement everything we need lord everything is in you and you're in the word so we need the words lord may help us to make changes to our life where we need to help us to help each other life is full and sometimes the important things get left out like meeting with you would we help each other to meet with you and keep us going as a church lord would we be like this church in acts devoted to scripture and because that is what we need for everything in jesus name we pray amen

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