April 29/30, 2017

God Wins

Courage to Lead Series

2 Samuel 22: 1-51

Pastor Bryan Clark

You know, sadly, there's no shortage of preachers in the world today seeking to convince you that the Christian life is a life full of health, wealth, and prosperity. But that's just simply not true. It is contrary to two thousand years of church history and contrary to the clear teaching of the New Testament. As a matter of fact, the New Testament would say: as a Christian, you should expect trials and struggles and persecutions. It is entirely possible if you are a Christ follower, you should expect that you will spend time in the wilderness. And for some of you, it may be a majority of your life in the wilderness. It is also common in the wilderness that God feels like he's a million miles away. It feels like God doesn't know; He doesn't care, or maybe He's just powerless to do anything about it. Those are common feelings in the wilderness. I have walked that path myself. That is why it's so critical in those very difficult seasons of life that we remember and believe what David has to tell us in our passage this morning.

If you have a Bible, turn with us to 2 Samuel, Chapter 22. I mentioned last week, the last four chapters of 2 Samuel are not in chronological order but rather they're more like an appendix. They are four chapters that provide a summary, basically, of the life of David. What's unique about chapter 22 is it's actually written by David. This is David writing for himself, giving his overview of his life and especially his life as king. There's a little debate about whether this was written earlier in David's reign, before his sin with Bathsheba, or whether it was written at the end of his life, looking back. I tend to think it's at the end of his life looking back. We'll talk more about that in just a minute. It's fifty-one verses; it's a long psalm. There's no way to unpack all of it, but it is a beautiful psalm and I do want to read it all. There's certainly a risk in doing that, so I'm asking you, "Don't leave me, but discipline yourself; stay with us, and I want you to think about the images, the statements, the truths presented as they specifically relate to time in the wilderness." Whether you're in the wilderness now or you've been in the wilderness in the past, think of everything David is saying as it relates to that.

"The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer;
My God, my rock, in whom I take refuge,
My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold and my refuge;
My savior, You save me from violence.
"I call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised,
And I am saved from my enemies.
"For the waves of death encompassed me;
The torrents of destruction overwhelmed me;
The cords of Sheol surrounded me;
The snares of death confronted me.
"In my distress I called upon the LORD,
Yes, I cried to my God;
And from His temple He heard my voice,
And my cry for help *came* into His ears.

“Then the earth shook and quaked,
The foundations of heaven were trembling
And were shaken, because He was angry.
“Smoke went up out of His nostrils,
Fire from His mouth devoured;
Coals were kindled by it.
“He bowed the heavens also, and came down
With thick darkness under His feet.
“And He rode on a cherub and flew;
And He appeared on the wings of the wind.
“And He made darkness canopies around Him,
A mass of waters, thick clouds of the sky.
“From the brightness before Him
Coals of fire were kindled.
“The LORD thundered from heaven,
And the Most High uttered His voice.
“And He sent out arrows, and scattered them,
Lightning, and routed them.
“Then the channels of the sea appeared,
The foundations of the world were laid bare
By the rebuke of the LORD,
At the blast of the breath of His nostrils.
“He sent from on high, He took me;
He drew me out of many waters.
“He delivered me from my strong enemy,
From those who hated me, for they were too strong for me.
“They confronted me in the day of my calamity,
But the LORD was my support.
“He also brought me forth into a broad place;
He rescued me, because He delighted in me.
“The LORD has rewarded me according to my righteousness;
According to the cleanness of my hands He has recompensed me.
“For I have kept the ways of the LORD,
And have not acted wickedly against my God.
“For all His ordinances *were* before me,
And *as for* His statutes, I did not depart from them.
“I was also blameless toward Him,
And I kept myself from my iniquity.
“Therefore the LORD has recompensed me according to my righteousness,
According to my cleanness before His eyes.
“With the kind You show Yourself kind,
With the blameless You show Yourself blameless;
With the pure You show Yourself pure,
And with the perverted You show Yourself astute.
“And You save an afflicted people;
But Your eyes are on the haughty *whom* You abase.
“For You are my lamp, O LORD;
And the LORD illumines my darkness.

"For by You I can run upon a troop;
By my God I can leap over a wall.
"As for God, His way is blameless;
The word of the LORD is tested;
He is a shield to all who take refuge in Him.
"For who is God, besides the LORD?
And who is a rock, besides our God?
"God is my strong fortress;
And He sets the blameless in His way.
"He makes my feet like hinds' *feet,*
And sets me on my high places.
"He trains my hands for battle,
So that my arms can bend a bow of bronze.
"You have also given me the shield of Your salvation,
And Your help makes me great.
"You enlarge my steps under me,
And my feet have not slipped.
"I pursued my enemies and destroyed them,
And I did not turn back until they were consumed.
"And I have devoured them and shattered them, so that they did not rise;
And they fell under my feet.
"For You have girded me with strength for battle;
You have subdued under me those who rose up against me.
"You have also made my enemies turn *their* backs to me,
And I destroyed those who hated me.
"They looked, but there was none to save;
***Even* to the LORD, but He did not answer them.**
"Then I pulverized them as the dust of the earth;
I crushed *and* stamped them as the mire of the streets.
"You have also delivered me from the contentions of my people;
You have kept me as head of the nations;
A people whom I have not known serve me.
"Foreigners pretend obedience to me;
As soon as they hear, they obey me.
"Foreigners lose heart,
And come trembling out of their fortresses.
"The LORD lives, and blessed be my rock;
And exalted be God, the rock of my salvation,
The God who executes vengeance for me,
And brings down peoples under me,
Who also brings me out from my enemies;
You even lift me above those who rise up against me;
You rescue me from the violent man.
"Therefore I will give thanks to You, O LORD, among the nations,
And I will sing praises to Your name.
"*He* is a tower of deliverance to His king,
And shows lovingkindness to His anointed,
To David and his descendants forever." (*NASB, 2 Samuel 22:2-51)

It's a beautiful psalm of David's belief in God's faithfulness, God's power, God's deliverance, but it's really important to understand, during David's times in the wilderness, it is highly unlikely that he saw it that way in the moment. As a matter of fact, you can read the multiple psalms that David wrote as king in Israel. Many of them are full of questions—feeling deserted, feeling forgotten—wondering if God even cares or if He knows or if He's just powerless to do anything about it. Clearly, in the wilderness David often struggled with the question, "Where is God in all of this?" Now at the end of his life, he looks back and regains some perspective. We remember that David was just a young shepherd boy when Samuel seemingly appeared out of nowhere and anointed him the next king of Israel. The next thing you know, David is fighting the giant Goliath; David wins this mighty victory, and that's kind of the moment where we really fall in love with David. But we realize virtually from that moment on, David's life became a nightmare—roughly a decade and a half in the wilderness, fleeing as a fugitive for his life because Saul wanted to kill him. You may have had a bad day. You may have had a bad week. You may have had a bad month. You may have had a bad year. But you have to get your mind around a decade and a half of confusion and disappointment and heartache and wondering, "Where is God and why does it have to be this way?" Again, the psalms that David wrote out of those years indicate it was a difficult, disappointing struggle of trying to figure out God in the wilderness. So now, looking back, he's regained some perspective that God *was there*, that God *did listen*, that God *did care*, that God *was powerful*. It's actually quite a remarkable thing that at the end of the story, David would die of old age at the age of seventy. For a man who, for most of his life, was pursued by people wanting to kill him, it's quite remarkable that he ultimately, simply, died of old age.

We don't have time to unpack all of this. I'm just going to handpick some things that I think might be helpful. The beginning of the psalm, which by the way, is replicated almost exactly in Psalm 18. It's probably most likely David wrote the psalm right here in 2 Samuel 22, and it was adapted slightly for corporate worship, and shows up in your Bible also as Psalm 18. You imagine David in the wilderness, fighting for his life, and experiencing these images that he talks about, only for him they were real, literal images. But he creates out of them metaphors to describe God for him in the process.

So, for example, verse 2, **The LORD is my Rock...**is actually the Hebrew word for *crag*. There are two Hebrew words translated *rock*. This is the one like a cliff or a crag. It would be the idea of many times he made his way to the top of this sheer cliff and for him it was a place of safety, a place of protection, a place to hide from the enemy, so he's saying that's who God has been for him. **My rock and my fortress**—the fortress images for us are very difficult to understand. Probably unless you've been deployed in the military, there's little understanding of what a fortress is to us. But think about: in the middle of a winter storm, or even now in the midst of a spring storm where the weather is getting crazy and the wind and the rain, possibly hail and tornadoes, feels like everything is kind of coming unhinged outside. And yet you sit in your nice warm, dry house, drinking a cup of coffee and simply watch the chaos out the window. That's the idea of a fortress. While it's raging outside, this is a place of safety, a place of comfort, a place of security. And that's how he's describing his relationship with God. **My deliverer**—David used this exact word when, as a shepherd boy, he stood before King Saul and he described that, at one time in his life God had delivered him from the lion, had delivered him from the bear, so he believed that God would deliver him from this big mouth giant by the name of Goliath. It is a reminder that nobody just wakes up one morning ready to slay a giant. You learn to trust God in the ordinary things of life. You maybe have to be delivered from a lion, delivered from a bear, before you're ready to take on the giant Goliath. But David looks back over his life and recognizes God has been, for him, a **deliverer**.

Verse 3: **My God, my rock, in whom I take refuge**... That's another one of those images that makes little sense to us. What does he mean *a rock* and how do you *seek refuge in a rock*? Well in the ancient Near East, in the wilderness where David spent so many years hiding from Saul, you're talking about *massive boulders*. These boulders were places of protection; they were places of security; they were places of shade, and I'm going to imagine David spent many, many, many nights under one of these huge boulders seeking safety and refuge from enemies in the wilderness.

So he goes on with a lot of those kinds of images but you kind of get the point. He talks about literally thinking, believing almost every day that his life was in peril because of the enemies that were around him, seeking to put him to death. It's a good reminder: David's not a seminary professor talking in theological theory. David lived this in a powerful way, day after day, year after year.

Starting in verse 7 he cries out to God and God hears him and responds and the metaphor—the imagery he uses to communicate this—is the imagery of a storm. It's common in the Old Testament that when the writers wanted to communicate the awesome, furious power of God, they often used the imagery of a storm. You have it in Psalm 29, which is one of my favorites. You also have it very powerfully here in 2 Samuel 22. So this is good for us in the Midwest. You think about: in the spring we get some of these building-shaking storms where the thunder rocks the place and you have this sense of the awesome fury of God. For all of our science, for all of our sophistication, for all of our knowledge, at the end of the day, when natural disasters hit, it always brings us to our knees and we are reminded of the awesome power of God. My hope would be that in these spring days ahead—there are going to be a lot of these storms still to come—that the next time the thunder explodes and it shakes things and just kind of rocks the place, that it will remind you of David's description of God and a reminder that God will be enough for you in whatever storm you're going through.

So in verse 8, when he talks about **...the earth shook and quaked...** he's talking about the thunder that just rocks the building. **The foundations of Heaven were trembling**. Why? Because he's angry; He's angry because somebody is messing with his child. Verse 9: **Smoke went up out of his nostrils. Fire from his mouth devoured. Coals were kindled by it.** So imagine looking to the horizon and the storm clouds are kind of building and rolling and that looks like smoke coming out of God's nostrils. The lightening in the clouds is that picture of fire coming out of his mouth and sometimes when you look on the horizon and there's lightning in the clouds, it almost looks like there are coals burning in the base of the clouds. And that's the imagery that this is God coming forth to action. Verse 10: **He bowed the heavens**... Verse 11: **And he rode on a cherub and flew**. A cherub would be a winged-beast. So this is powerful imagery. You've got smoke coming out of the nostrils of God, fire coming out of His mouth. It sets the clouds on fire. There's this base of coals. He's on this winged-beast, and He's coming out of the heavens to deal with David's enemy because David has cried out to Him. Verse 12 talks about the darkness and the rain coming, verse 13 again the coals, verse 14, the thunder as the voice of God, and verse 15, arrows. He's talking about lightning bolts—that they're the arrows of God that He's flinging out against David's enemies. So it's a powerful imagery of the awesomeness of God.

Now looking back—again you have to marvel at the fact that David died of old age. You think of how many times in our story he was right on the edge of perishing and it must have felt like God was a million miles away. Yet, at the end of his life, looking back, God actually was there and listening and came to his rescue again and again and again. I love it in verse 20 when he says, "**He also brought me forth into a broad place. He rescued me,**" Why? **Because he delighted in me**."

While David's emotions must have felt like God had long forgotten him, the reality is, looking back, actually God delights in His child and time and time and time again God demonstrated Himself to be faithful.

Starting in verse 21 and it really goes through verse 25, there's this discussion of David saying he walked in obedience; he followed the statutes of the Lord; that David had sought to be a man after God's own heart. This is the part of the psalm that causes some scholars to say this was written earlier in David's reign as king because it could not have been written after the sin with Bathsheba and Uriah—so the only logical explanation is that it was written before that. I will grant you that there's no way to actually date the psalm; it could have been earlier, could have been later. I take it was at the end of his life for other reasons that show up in the psalm, but I will tell you this. I have significant theological problems with the conclusion that this had to have been written before the sin with Bathsheba. What are we saying when we say that? Are we saying that David had not sinned up until that moment? Are we saying that David had accomplished a *work's righteousness* before a holy God up until that moment with Bathsheba? Are we also saying, as a result of David's sin with Bathsheba and murder of Uriah, that the psalm no longer applies? He couldn't have written it after that because he biffed it and once he biffed it, the psalm doesn't apply? And if that's the case, it isn't a psalm filled with hope; it's a psalm filled with hopelessness. It's a psalm filled with despair. Basically the psalm would be saying, "This would have been true of you but you biffed it! And now that you've biffed it, it no longer can be true of you!" That would eliminate everyone in the room and it's just a terrible theology. As a matter of fact, it's not a biblical theology.

I think what David is saying is that over the course of his lifetime, the trajectory of his life was as a man after God's own heart. He wasn't perfect; he doesn't claim to be perfect. But the truth is that David was chosen to be king because God Himself defined him as a man after God's own heart. The truth is when David inherited the kingdom, the kingdom was far from God—it was just a spiritual mess. David brought the nation back to be a worshipping nation of Yahweh, their God. David earned the respect of the pagan nations around them so that they revered the God of Israel. David moved the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem; God was in the center of the nation and the overall trajectory of David's life is what is described here. David was a man who had a passionate desire to walk in obedience to God. There are times when he blew it and made a mess of things, but failure is not final. Those sins do not ultimately define the overall trajectory of his life.

It's interesting when you talk to people about David, most people identify the Goliath story, but the second thing they identify is the Bathsheba story. For forty years David reigned as a remarkable king in Israel, yet we're willing to define the entirety of his life based on the fact that he biffed it with Bathsheba and Uriah and that then defines the story of David. The reason that is such a concern for me is because we not only define David that way, we define ourselves that way. We so often as Christians define ourselves on the basis of our failures. There are people seated in the auditorium today who sinned five years ago...ten years ago...twenty years ago...thirty years ago, and you just can't get over it. It defines your life. When you look in the mirror, that's what you see and even though, yes, you sinned before a holy God and there are consequences to that, that doesn't define your life. God's grace is enough. Go back and read David's own word in Psalm 51, in Psalm 32. David knew he was a forgiven man. Failure's not final. Just because you biffed it doesn't mean that defines the entirety of your life. We have reminded ourselves again and again: failure is not final. We're all going to make a mess of things. You accept God's grace and forgiveness; you get back on your feet, and again you seek to walk uprightly before God. At the end of the day, we stand *in* Christ. We stand righteous before a holy God. There's always this dangerous risk of defining the entirety of our lives by one or two or three bad decisions over time.

He goes on then, pick it up halfway through verse 27**...And with the perverted, you show yourself astute and you save an afflicted people. But your eyes are on the haughty, whom you abase**. Verse 27b could be translated: *And with the crooked, you show yourself crooked*. Or *with the clever, you show yourself clever*. There are two different Hebrew words but very similar in their meaning. When he talks about the arrogant or the proud or the haughty, basically what it says is God's not above knocking them down a few pegs to humble them. Basically what he's saying in this part of the psalm, is to those who think they are so smart, they are so sophisticated, they are so scientific, they are so enlightened in a 21st century America, that somehow we've become so clever that we can deal with God on our terms. So we deal with God by redefining God. We deal with God by making up our own religion. We deal with God by making up our own spirituality and, at the end of the day, we'll do God but we'll do God on our terms. And if the truth is known, deep in our highly sophisticated, clever hearts, we think, at the end of the day, we've kind of cleverly pulled one over on God. That's in essence what David is saying.

Several years ago—many years ago actually—I took a group of high schoolers to Mexico City on a mission trip—a great, great bunch of young people. Most of the time we were engaged in mission work, but one free day was like a tourist day. Mexico City is a very interesting place. In some ways it's a very beautiful city and it's a very historical city—a lot of real interesting historical things to see. One of those was the pyramids—the ancient pyramids there. So we were traveling in a bus to see the pyramids, and the missionaries who were functioning as the guides basically said to these teenagers, "Now, when you get off the bus there will be a lot of Mexican vendors there to sell merchandise to the tourists and they'll kind of be on you like flies. Just politely ignore them and understand that at the end of the day we'll go to the market, and virtually everything they're selling will be available at the market at a fraction of the price they're selling it here." So they were very clear about that. We get off the bus and just what they said: you know the vendors see Americans and that means money. They were all over these kids—trying to sell them. They're very persistent. When we eventually got back on the bus, I noticed quite a few of the teenagers had souvenirs and I thought, "Well, it's their money...whatever...it's not that big of a deal." But then I was listening to them talk on the bus and the talk was actually kind of amusing. They had heard stories where you go to Mexico and you can barter, and wheel and deal, and really get a deal. So they had absolutely convinced themselves that they had really taken it to the vendors—that through their highly developed negotiating skills and wheeling and dealing, they had bought this for a fraction of what the vendors wanted, and they had really showed them their stuff. That held up until we went to the market that evening. Virtually everything they had purchased was available in the market for a fraction of the negotiated price they settled on. And I found myself thinking: That's actually kind of funny. What would possess a group of teenagers in a small rural town in Nebraska to think they're going to go to Mexico City and wheel and deal with these vendors who have been doing this with tourists longer than they've been alive, and yet somehow with these great negotiating skills, they're really going to pull one over on them? That's exactly what David is talking about. That we, with our great knowledge, we with our great enlightenment, we with our great science, we with now all our discoveries, have convinced ourselves we're so enlightened, we're so smart, we're so intelligent that we ourselves are going to define God; we're going to define our relationship with God. We're going to do it all on our terms and, at the end of the day, there's something in our arrogant hearts that thinks, "You know, we're going to kind of pull one over on God and get away with it." And what David is saying in this psalm is: that is just utterly ridiculous. At the end of the day, God wins. At the end of the day, God always wins. I'll grant you, there are things in the Bible that are confusing; there are things that are unclear; there are things that are mysterious, but one thing that is not unclear—it couldn't be more abundantly clear—and that is, at the end of the story, God wins! He always wins! And that's what David is reflecting on in this psalm.

He says it again in verse 32, "**For who is God, besides the Lord**," besides Yahweh, our God. And of course, the answer is, "No one!" In verse 42 he talks about his enemies. *They looked but there was no one to save them*. There simply was no other God among the pagans that could defeat the God of Israel. He goes on and talks about that starting in verse 47—kind of wraps up his summary. Verse 50 is actually quoted in Romans chapter 15, verse 9, and is clearly attached to the Messiah. Those last couple of verses that talk about the anointed one, the king, the line, the descendants of David forever, are all a reference to the coming of the Messiah—that roughly a thousand years later, the perfect, ideal, longed-for King would come. It would be God in the flesh who would shed his blood in atonement for sin, in order to offer salvation freely as a gift to those who would receive it. But it's critically important to remember that salvation includes past, present, and future—that God *has saved* us from our sins, he *is currently saving* us in the wilderness and one day *will ultimately save us* from this world and deliver us to a kingdom to come that will be everything that we've ever wanted it to be. Ultimately, every longing that your soul has will be fulfilled and realized in the kingdom to come. We know we can count on that because God always wins, and because it was a gift of God's grace, so it cannot be lost or taken away. If we know that, then it should change the way we go through the wilderness experiences of life.

Years ago Patti and I kind of started following an Olympic runner. We followed him in the trials; he was kind of a Cinderella story. We got into the human interest part of the whole story. So he qualified for the Olympics and so we watched him faithfully through the Olympics and really, in sort of a surprising fashion, he made it all the way to the Olympic finals. So we were pretty excited to see if he could win and cheer him on to victory. So I remember one evening I came home; the race was on; we gathered around the television. This runner's kind of signature style was he would fall behind, get into the middle and even the back of the pack, and then crank it up at the end with this amazing kick and would win the race. So immediately that's what happens. He falls behind and he falls way behind. So he's clear behind even the middle of the pack and Patti is cheering and she's kind of yelling and he's getting farther and farther behind—the possibility of winning is less and less—and she's really kind of emotionally getting excited with all this, and I'm sitting there cool, calm, and collected. I'm saying things like, "Look at the way he's striding; it looks like that's exactly where he wants to be. Look at the expression on his face. Look at the way he's running. I think this is exactly his plan." And I'm the picture of cool, calm, and collected. Well sure enough, in the last lap of the race, he cranks it up with this amazing kick; he passes everyone; he ultimately wins the race and wins the gold medal. After Patti cheered, she looked at me and she said, "How did you know he was going to win?" I said, "Because I read it in the paper this morning." (*laughter*) As is often true with the Olympics, the broadcast had a time-delay and I just happened to have read in the paper that morning that the runner actually won the gold medal. Knowing what I knew, to be acting like Patti through the race would have been quite ridiculous. I already knew how it ended. If I knew that, it should have changed my reactions all the way through the race.

If you know, at the end of the story, God wins, if you know at the end of the story everything that your soul has longed for will ultimately be realized in Christ in the new heaven and the new earth and, no matter how bad this life gets, you can't lose that, it can't be taken away, it can't be diminished and it's yours based on the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus—if you actually know that and believe it, it should change the way you go through the most difficult seasons of life. How you hold up in the wilderness will be largely determined by whether or not you believe, at the end of the story, God wins.

Our Father, we celebrate this morning our belief that at the end of the story You do win and the salvation that You have promised, which will only be fully realized in the world to come, will be all that our souls long for today. God, there are people in this room who feel forgotten; they feel like You're a million miles away; they feel like You really don't care anymore. They wonder if you even have the power to do anything about it. God, remind us again through the words of David that even in the most difficult seasons of life, You are there much more than we realize, that You delight in Your child, that You're angered when Your children are abused, and that, God, ultimately You will get us through to the finish line, to the ultimate kingdom that our souls long for. Lord, this we pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

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Courage to Lead

2 Samuel 22:1-51

Pastor Bryan Clark

Opening Discussion

1. What are some examples of hard things you've gone through or are going through that seem to make no sense? Have you done time in the wilderness? Explain.

2. Can you think of things you've gone through that were hurtful and confusing? In the moment (wilderness) God often seems distant or even silent. Yet, often when we look back years later we can see that God had His hand on us every step of the way. Can you recall an example of this in your life?

Bible Study

1. Read II Samuel 22:1-51. Imagine David is writing this at the end of his life. What all has he been through over his lifetime? David uses many images in this Psalm to describe what God has been to him, especially in the hard times. What are some of those images and which images can you identify with?

2. Notice David's description of God in II Samuel 22:8-17. The writers of Scripture often use images from a severe thunderstorm to describe the power of God. Compare Psalm 29. How can a Nebraska thunderstorm remind you to trust God no matter what you're going through?

3. Notice David's words in 22:21-25. Some would make the case that this was written before the sin with Bathsheba and Uriah otherwise he could never make these statements. That logic seems to imply David had no other sins. What seems more likely is that David is saying that the overall theme of his life was to walk uprightly before God. Compare Psalm 32.

4. How does God deal with the crooked and the arrogant according to 22:27, 28?

5. Looking back over his life David sees that God has always been faithful, even when David wasn't. The only real explanation for why David died of old age is that God was on his side. Realistically, he should have been dead several times over. Compare with

Paul's words in Romans 8:31-39. How does the story ultimately turn out for us as believers? How should we live then knowing who wins in the end?

Application

1. What are your three favorite images for God that David uses in this Psalm? How does remembering those images help you go through the hard times?

2. How can you use thunderstorms to remind you of the truths of this Psalm?

3. What are some practical things you can do individually or as a group to remember in the hard times that Romans 8 is true and God ultimately wins?

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