February 22/23, 2020

If Anyone is Thirsty

These Things are Written that You May Believe Series

John 7:25-53

Pastor Bryan Clark

I think it's hard for us in 21st century America to really understand the seriousness, the significance, of water to the ancient world. It was literally life and death, even far more than food. If you didn't find water, you didn't live. That's why the water illustrations in Scripture tend to be so vivid. They tend to be so powerful. So imagine you're in the ancient world. You don't have the advantage of all the knowledge and maps and science that we have. You're dying of thirst. You come up over the hill, and you see a huge body of water. And in that moment, you are convinced you found what you've been looking for—you will never thirst again! But you have no idea that what you found is salt water.

I read this several years ago:

> *"Ocean water contains seven times more salt than the human body can safely ingest. Drinking it, a person dehydrates because the kidneys demand extra water to flush the overload of salt. The more salt water someone drinks, the thirstier he gets, he actually dies of thirst."*
>
> *(Illustrations for Preaching & Teaching from Leadership Journal, 1993 by Christianity Today, Inc., Co-published by Christianity Today, Inc., and Baker Book House Company. P 147)*

I've often thought about how accurate a description that is, of the things we seek that we think are going to make us happy. "Finally, this is what I've been looking for!" Maybe for some of you, it's been religion. Finally, "It will be God!" only to be disillusioned and disappointed and hurt. For others, it's something else. I've asked this question before; I'm sure I'll ask it again—but it's a legitimate question, "What are you looking for?" What is it you're seeking after that you can't find in Jesus? Why all the alcohol? Why the drugs? Why the pornography? Why all the relationships and the sex? Why this pursuit for money and stuff and position and power? What are you looking for? And the fact that you're still searching, isn't that indicative of the fact you're not finding it? At some point, don't you have to realize what you're doing is not working. Perhaps there's some other way.

Well, that's what we want to talk about this morning. If you have a Bible, turn with us to the Gospel of John, Chapter seven. If you're new with us, we're working our way through the Gospel of John; we find ourselves halfway through chapter seven this morning.

The story finds us about six months out from Jesus' arrest and crucifixion. Things are getting very intense. Jesus has come to Jerusalem secretly during the Feast of Tabernacles, or the Feast of Booths. He's made His way quietly to the temple, and there in the temple courtyard He begins to speak. He reminds the people that they claim to be of Moses. They revered Moses, and supposedly are passionate about the law. But the truth is they don't keep the law. They want to kill Jesus for breaking the law, but they themselves don't keep it. Jesus went so far as to say, "Actually, you don't get it at all!"

Somehow they've come to the conclusion that the law can save them. Rather than leading them to Christ, it's become a substitute for Christ to such a degree that when the Messiah comes, they want to get rid of Him. Jesus identified Himself as the fulfillment of the law, the fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham. He's the fulfillment of the sign of the covenant—circumcision. He's the fulfillment of the Sabbath. He's the bread of life, the manna in the desert. He's the fulfillment of all these images

and pictures. But the sad reality is, rather than the law leading them to Christ, it's become the barrier. It's become a substitute, and they're rejecting Jesus, which gets us to verse 25:

> **So some of the people of Jerusalem were saying, "Is this not the man whom they are seeking to kill? Look, He is speaking publicly, and they are saying nothing to Him. The rulers do not really know that this is the Christ, do they? However, we know where this man is from; but whenever the Christ may come, no one knows where He is from."**
> (*NASB, John 7:25-27)

Jesus is speaking in the temple, and some in the crowd are trying to figure out, "Isn't this the one they're trying to kill, yet they just let Him go on talking? Why doesn't someone stop Him?" I think rather sarcastically, "Do they think this is the Messiah, the Christ?" In their minds, "Why wouldn't they stop Him?"

Now in the passage last week, in verse 20, some in the crowd said to Jesus, "You're crazy. Nobody's trying to kill you." But these people in the crowd know someone's wanting to kill Jesus. So it's helpful to understand, in first century Jerusalem, at this time, there was probably somewhere in the neighborhood of 750,000 to a million people crowded into that city. In addition, all these people that have come for the feasts—which was the most popular of the three major feasts—so you're easily talking about a million and a half, two million, two and a half million people. So, these are massive crowds!

John's just identifying different conversations that are going on in these little clusters within the crowd. Some are surprised by the idea that someone's trying to kill Jesus. Others know that's the case, but they're puzzled as to why the rulers don't stop Him. But then they themselves identify that this can't be the Messiah. "We know better, and the reason we know better is because we know where He's from. We know who this is; we know where He lives. We know His mother and father; He's from Nazareth, but the Messiah will come out of nowhere. No one will know where He's from. He'll just appear on the scene, and He'll lead us to freedom from the Romans."

What's interesting about that—and this will essentially come up three times in this text—is this blend of biblical truth with misinformation. The fact of the matter is, it's not true that the Messiah would come out of nowhere and suddenly appear and lead them to freedom. The Old Testament is quite clear: He will be born in Bethlehem. You remember when the magi came to Herod and Herod was trying to figure out where this king would be born, he brings in the rulers, and they say, "Yes, He'll be born in Bethlehem." But this is a common problem, that there is this blending of biblical truth with other information. It may come from some tradition; it may come from some bad teaching. It may come from a local church; it may be wider than that. But oftentimes there's this blend of what's true with what is not true—and people don't realize that.

We've had more than our share within our own fundamentalist movement of what's actually in the Bible and what we have added—acting like that's also in the Bible. Think about this. These people are actually rejecting the Messiah who stands right in front of them. Based on misinformation, they concluded that was what the Old Testament teaches, so this can't be the Messiah, because we know where He's from. Verse 28:

> **Then Jesus cried out in the temple,** (That word *cried*, we'd probably say *yelled*. This is a massive crowd, and Jesus is yelling at the top of His voice so the crowd can hear Him.) **…teaching and saying, "You both know Me and know where I am from; and I have**

not come of Myself, but He who sent Me is true, whom you do not know. I know Him, because I am from Him, and He sent Me." (Vs. 28, 29)

So the Father has sent Jesus. Again, that word **sent** is *apostello*; it's a Greek word that means *officially sent*. He's sent on a mission, He's sent officially to represent the Father, to exegete, to reveal the Father and the plan of salvation. Now in the original Greek language, you don't have punctuation. We're always trying to figure out what that is. The first part of that could either be a question, so Jesus is saying something like, "So you think you know Me, and where I'm from?" He's questioning that. Or it could be simply, "Yes, you know Me, and you know where I'm from. But then again, you don't really know Me, and you don't understand where I'm from." So it could go either way. But what Jesus is saying is that He is from the Father, sent on a mission to fulfill the promise, but they just don't get that. And the reason they don't get that is at the end of verse 28, *because they don't know God.*

Now this is worth stopping and thinking about for a moment. These are highly religious people, many of them zealous for their religion. And there is this tendency to think all roads lead to God, and religion is all about God. But what Jesus just said to these highly religious people is, "*The reason you don't understand this is because you don't know God."* Religion does not get us to God. It becomes the barrier to getting to God, and that's exactly the problem here. Verse 30:

So they were seeking to seize Him; and no man laid his hands on Him, because His hour had not yet come. But many of the crowd believed in Him; and they were saying, "When the Christ comes, He will not perform more signs than those which this man has, will He?" (Vs. 30, 31)

So there's some that want to seize Him; they want to grab Him. The text just tells us they were not able to. This comes up several times. I think the text is saying that there's some sort of supernatural thing God is doing that will prevent the crowd from grabbing Jesus until it's God's time for Him to go to the cross. How exactly that played out, the text doesn't tell us. But there's also those in the crowd who believe; they're figuring this out. The rationale is, "How much evidence do you need? Surely there's never going to be anyone else that is going to come and do more than this man has done. The evidence is overwhelming!" Essentially they're saying, "How much more evidence do you need? We believe!" So there are people that are starting to get it. Verse 32:

The Pharisees heard the crowd muttering these things about Him, and the chief priests and the Pharisees sent officers to seize Him.

Some of the people are starting to believe. The religious leaders can't have that, so they need to take action. The ruling body in Israel was called the Sanhedrin, and they ruled under the authority of Rome. The Sanhedrin was made up of two principal bodies: the Pharisees and the Sadducees, or the chief priests. The Pharisees were very conservative. They were very religious, and they were very zealous for the law. The Sadducees were very social. They were very liberal, and the two groups greatly disliked one another. They came together to form the Sanhedrin. So when it's talking about the rulers, that's the ruling body, that's who it's talking about. Now, even though they despised one another, their hatred for Jesus brings them together. Adversity makes strange bedfellows, and that's kind of what you have here. What they do agree upon together is, "Jesus must go!"

The word **seize** there is the equivalent for us of an *arrest warrant.* They're sending the **officers**, which are the temple police. The temple guard or the temple police were Jewish; they were not Romans. They were primarily Levites, who functioned as the temple police. So, this is the first time in John's Gospel where there is an official arrest warrant issued and the temple police are sent to bring Him in.

Therefore, (verse 33, in light of this) **Jesus said, "For a little while longer I am with you, then I go to Him who sent Me. You will seek Me and will not find Me; and where I am, you cannot come." The Jews then said to one another, "Where does this man intend to go that we will not find Him? He is not intending to go to the Dispersion among the Greeks, and teach the Greeks, is He? What is this statement that He has said, 'You will seek Me, and will not find Me; and where I am, you cannot come'?"** (Vs. 33-36)

So Jesus is identifying that soon enough will come His death, His burial, His resurrection, and His ascension back to the Father. So, Jesus will go back to heaven, to the right hand of the Father. They will seek Him, but they can't find Him. But then He says the most terrible words. As a matter of fact, Martin Luther said, "I hate these words. I don't like reading them." At the end of verse 34, He says, **"Where I am, you cannot come."** Just stop and think about this. He is talking to highly religious people, in this case, the rulers of Israel. And what He just said is, "Soon enough I'm going back to heaven, and you cannot come!" Contrast that with what Jesus said to His disciples in John chapter 14, verses 2-6:

"I go to prepare a place for you, that where I am, there you may be also." Thomas says, "Lord, we don't know where You are going; how do we get there? Show us the way." Jesus says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. Nobody comes to the Father but through Me."

What Jesus was saying to these highly religious people is, "Unless something changes, and you understand who I am and what I've come to do, I'm going to heaven and you cannot come. Religion doesn't get you there." He couldn't have stated that any more clearly. But again, they misunderstand, as has been consistently the case. "What is He talking about? Where is He going?" There were millions of Jews *dispersed* out of the land among the Greeks. And that's what they're referring to. The religious leaders would never go there because they would be defiled by being among the Gentiles. "So maybe He's going to go out among the Gentiles because they won't follow Him there." That's the closest they can come to figuring it out. Verse 37:

Now on the last day, the great *day* of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying…

Just before we see what Jesus says, I want to give you a little background here. This is the **last day of the feast**. There's discussion as to whether this is the seventh day or the eighth day. The feast was seven days, so this could be the final day of the feast. But over time, they added an eighth day that was part of the feast, but kind of dissimilar, and pretty much all scholars agreed by this time period, there were eight days. So that's why they argue which day it is. The ultimate end is it isn't all that important.

What is important is to understand that this Feast of Booths, or tabernacles, was filled with pageantry. It was filled with joy and life and singing and celebration. Every day for seven days, one of the great moments each day was a procession led by the priests that would go to the pool of Salome. The people would follow with branches very similar to Palm Sunday. You remember the branches are what made up the booths. They were meant to represent their life as nomads in the wilderness. That's why it's called the Feast of Booths. They would take one of those branches; they'd wave it; they'd sing; they'd celebrate. The priest had a golden pitcher. He would fill it up with water at the pool of Salome, and this procession that was probably thousands of people strong, would head back through the water gate and up to the temple. The people are singing various songs; they're chanting; they're celebrating. The priest finally gets to the altar. The shofar—the ram's horn—blasts three blasts and the priest would pour the water in a bowl next to the altar, and the water would run to the base of the altar. It was all symbolic of God's provision of water in the wilderness, when Moses spoke to the

rock, and the water flowed out of the rock. That's what they were commemorating. So they're commemorating God's provision, God's goodness. They would shout; they would sing; they would celebrate. It was a glorious moment!

If this is day seven, it's probably right before, right after that moment. If it's day eight, this is the one day where that procession didn't happen. So, it may be the time of day when it's happened for seven days, and Jesus steps up and delivers these words:

> **"If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink."** (Vs: 37b)

Imagine against that backdrop, Jesus is identifying himself as the water. He's the fulfillment. He's already identified Himself as the fulfillment of the manna in the wilderness. He's identified himself to the Samaritan woman as the water of life. Again, all these Old Testament, old covenant symbols ultimately pictured Jesus. He's identifying Himself as the fulfillment of the Feast of Tabernacles. He's the water. Whatever it is you're looking for, whatever it is you're trying to find, whatever you think is going to satisfy that thirsty soul, it's Me! It's not religion. It's not religious activity. It's not good works. It's none of that. It's a relationship with a Person. How do we drink of this water? Verse 38: **He who believes…** This has been the consistent message. "How do you eat the bread?" "You believe!" "How do you drink the water?" "You believe!" "You believe Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah, the fulfillment, the Christ."

> **"He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.'" But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet *given*, because Jesus was not yet glorified.** (Vs. 38-39)

Verse 39 is what we would refer to as an editorial comment. John is trying to help us understand what Jesus meant. When Jesus teaches His disciples in the upper room, which we will eventually get to, He talks about the need to return to His Father. And when He returns to the Father, He will send His Spirit, and the Spirit will indwell every believer. You actually have the very presence of the Spirit of Jesus dwelling in you. It's like a well full of water that delivers this life that your soul longs for. So that's what Jesus promises them. Verse 40,

> **Some of the people therefore, when they heard these words, were saying, "This certainly is the Prophet." Others were saying, "This is the Christ." Still others were saying, "Surely the Christ is not going to come from Galilee, is He? Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the descendants of David, and from Bethlehem, the village where David was?" So a division occurred in the crowd because of Him. Some of them wanted to seize Him, but no one laid their hands on Him.** (Vs. 40-45)

So again, there's differences of opinion among the crowd. Some think he's the Prophet from Deuteronomy 18. We've seen that a number of times. Some are getting it, "We think He's the Christ!" Others are wanting to seize Him, but God doesn't allow that. It's interesting again, this is the second time you have a group of people who think they have figured out why He's not the Messiah. "He can't be the Messiah; the Messiah will come from Bethlehem. He's not from Bethlehem. He's from Nazareth. Can't be this guy." Now, one group thinks He will appear out of nowhere; another group thinks, "Well, we know where He is coming from; He is coming from Bethlehem, which is right down the road—and He didn't come from there.

If you go back to verse 17, what Jesus said is, "*If you want to know the truth, God will get you there.*" This is now the second case where there's a blend of misinformation that is literally keeping them from the Messiah. It would have taken very little work to figure out, "Yes, He grew up in Nazareth but, by the way, He was born in Bethlehem. It's just a little way down the road." Just ask a few questions and you could have realized this is actually the fulfillment of the prophecy. But this misinformation keeps people from recognizing the Messiah who is literally standing right in front of them. Verse 45:

> **The officers then came to the chief priests and Pharisees, and they said to them, "Why did you not bring Him?" The officers** (This would be the temple police.) **answered, "Never has a man spoken the way this man speaks."** (Vs. 45, 46)

So this is the temple police. They have been sent on a mission with an arrest warrant. They come back empty handed, and the Pharisees are none too happy. They're wanting to know why. And the temple police say, "You know, there's nobody that talks like this guy." Essentially they're saying, "We're not touching Him!" Whatever Jesus said earlier in the chapter—we aren't really privy to what that was, but the religious leaders were astonished! "Where did this guy get his education? How could he say things like this?"

The temple police, again, were not Romans. Romans would have gone in there and grabbed Jesus, any way necessary. But these are religiously sensitive Jewish people, and whatever Jesus said, something happened to them and they concluded, at probably great personal expense, "We're not touching this guy." And they go back, and they report to the Pharisees. Verse 47:

> **The Pharisees then answered them, "You have not also been led astray, have you? No one of the rulers or Pharisees has believed in Him, has he? But this crowd which does not know the Law is accursed."** (Vs. 47-49)

This is a very interesting conversation. First, they're saying to the temple police, "Wait a minute, you don't believe, do you? You haven't been persuaded, have you? They haven't gotten to you, have they?" Second, they say, "None of us have believed." In other words, "We're the standard. We're the experts. We know everything. You don't see any of us believing," so there's kind of a shame factor there. And then the third part is the reason some of those people in the crowd believe is because they're ignorant. They're stupid. They don't know the law.

So it's very interesting when you think about it as it relates to religion. The tendency is to think the clergy are the experts—and certainly they know everything. If they don't know everything, who possibly would? You have this spiritual arrogance among the clergy; they're the experts. "You don't need to know—we know! We'll tell you what's true. The reason people don't know is because they're stupid; they're ignorant. We are the experts; we will tell you." This was the position of the Pharisees.

One of the huge problems down through church history has been exactly this. Nowhere in the New Covenant is there this idea of a clergy class, and then the rest of the people. Everyone has equal access into the presence of God. They have equal access into the Word of God. That's the whole point. There is no layer in between you and that relationship with God. Just because somebody is numbered among the clergy doesn't mean they have it right.

History tells us the clergy has often been wrong. I have never asked you to believe anything just because I say it. As a matter of fact, just the opposite. We want people to read their Bibles. You say, "How do we know?" "It's in the Book! You have the Book; read it!" Yes, there are parts of the

Bible that are very complicated, but the main storyline isn't, and the message of Jesus is not complicated. Jesus clearly tells the truth.

I'm going to guess most people in the room this morning have no idea how many people have died to make it possible for you to have a Bible in your lap this morning. We just take it all for granted. We have it in the stores. We have it in our lap. We have ten of them at home. We have it on our phone. Do you realize, for so many years—hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of years—the clergy controlled the Scriptures? "You don't need to know it; we are the experts. We'll tell you what's true." And there was this blend together of what's true and what somebody else made up. It gets very difficult to figure out what part of this is biblical and what part of this is something somebody made up along the way. But people simply didn't have access to the Scriptures. Only the clergy had access. And as long as you hold that control, you have power and control over the people. Little by little people took it upon themselves to translate the Scriptures into the language of the people.

The New Testament is written in what we call Koine Greek. There was a classical Greek and there's Koine Greek, and Koine Greek is the street language of the people. The New Testament was written for the people to know for themselves what's true. The irony of what's happening in Jerusalem is it's actually the people that are figuring it out, and it's the clergy that are ignorant. Because they get so entrenched in their power and control, it stops being about truth, and it's about position. It's about power. It's about control.

The Old Testament is written in Hebrew; the New Testament is written in Greek. Then there was a Latin version, and these scholars came along and decided, "We need to get this into the language of the people." But to do that, they had to do it in secret; they had to do it in hiding. They became fugitives—they were wanted. Many, many, many were burned at the stake. They were executed. They had their heads cut off, and their crime was they were trying to translate the Scriptures into the language of the people. Hundreds died just trying to translate it into English. William Tyndale was one of those brave translators who famously said, "If he gets his mission accomplished, the boy that pulls the plow on the farm will know more of Scripture than the Catholic priests." During the time of the Reformation, most Catholic priests had little knowledge of the Scripture.

You have the Book. That's why God gave it to you—to read it and to understand what's true, and that you might find what your soul is looking for. This situation in Jerusalem is the same thing that happens today. The experts are often the people keeping you from getting to the truth your soul longs for. Verse 50,

> **Nicodemus (he who came to Him before, being one of them)** (So Nicodemus is a peer. He's a Pharisee; he's on the Sanhedrin. But he also came to Jesus by night. He's sincerely trying to figure this out, and he has real problems with what he's hearing.) …he **said to them, "Our law does not judge a man unless it first hears from him and knows what he is doing, does it?"** (vv. 50, 51)

So this is very interesting, Nicodemus does *not* say, "You know, I was just thinking this might be good." He is saying, "Our law requires that a man have a hearing before we pass judgment." These are the people that are supposedly so zealous for the law that they're going to kill Jesus for breaking the law. Nicodemus reminds them, "By the way, this is also in our law." You'd hope at that moment they would say, "Nicodemus, that's right, you make a really good point." So what did they say?

> **They answered him, "You are not also from Galilee, are you? Search, and see that no prophet arises out of Galilee." [And everyone went to his home.** (Vs. 52, 53)

I love the way that ends. So the religious leaders don't say, "You know, Nicodemus, that's right. We need to follow the law." They pick and choose the part of the law that they want to uphold, and they condemn Jesus for supposedly breaking it—and we'll just ignore the part that inconveniently gets in our way. So they say to Nicodemus, "You know, Nicodemus, are you from Galilee?" In other words, "You sound as stupid as them. You're not from there too, are you?" Now remember, in John 3 he's identified as *the* teacher in Israel. But in this moment, they must shame him into submission. "Ahh, Nicodemus! Are you from Galilee? Because you sound as dumb as them!" And then they say, "Look it up, Nicodemus. No prophets have ever come from Galilee. End of sentence—let's go home."

The problem is that's not true, and they had to have known that isn't true. Many prophets came from Galilee. Two in particular have books in the Old Testament—Nahum and Jonah. Of course they came from Galilee. They knew that, but at that moment truth is whatever you need it to be to control the people. This is no longer about the law. This is no longer about the truth. This is about power and control and what we need to do to win, which historically has happened again and again and again in religion. To me, religion is like coming over the hill when you're dying of thirst, and you see this body of water and you think, "This is it! Finally, this is what I've been looking for," only to be hurt, only to be disillusioned, only to be more thirsty than you were before.

In a room like this, I can't imagine how many people are here that have been deeply wounded by religion, sincerely seeking God. I talk to these people all the time. You don't find that which satisfies, and you walk away even more thirsty than you were before.

I don't know what it is for you. Maybe part of your story is the confusion around religion and trying to find God. What are you searching for? What are you trying to find in the alcohol? What are you trying to find in the pornography? What are you trying to find in the money, in the stuff, in the success, in the title and position? What are you looking for?

Imagine Jesus standing before us with all of our hurts and all of our searching and all of our struggles, and He says, "For anyone whose soul is thirsty, I've got what you're looking for. I offer you the water of life. What you're looking for is not a thing. It's not a religion, it's a Person, and all you have to do is drink." So, how do we do that? Just believe! Believe that Jesus was God in the flesh, that Jesus died on the cross for your sin, that Jesus was buried and rose again, and that Jesus offers salvation that can come no other way. But He offers it freely as a gift, if you're willing to receive it. All who are thirsty, just believe!

> *Our Father, we're thankful that when we were lost in our sin, our souls were so thirsty, You sent Jesus to be the water of life. Lord, the message is not, "Go out and get religious." The message is to acknowledge that I'm a sinner in need of a Savior, and to believe that Jesus did for me what I could never do for myself. Lord, may that be our story. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

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February 22/23, 2020

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That You May Believe

John 7:25-53

Pastor Bryan Clark

Opening Discussion

1. How would you describe spiritual thirst? What did that look like or feel like for you?

2. Whether people realize it or not everyone is searching for God in their own way. What are ways that shows up in our culture?

Bible Study

1. Read John 7:25-31. Describe the scene. What is happening in the crowd? Why do these highly religious people not get it according to Jesus?

2. Read John 7:32-36. Again, what does Jesus say to these highly religious people? Compare with Jesus' words in John 14:1-6. How do Jesus' words in 7:28-29 and 7:33-34 help us see more clearly the problem with religion?

3. Compare Paul's words in II Corinthians 11:12-15. The context makes it clear that Paul is referring to religion as the "angel of light." Compare Paul's words with what Jesus is facing in John's Gospel.

4. Read John 7:37-40. Compare Jesus' words with what He said to the woman at the well in John 4. What is the backdrop for Jesus' words in John 7? According to Jesus what does it mean to drink of this water?

5. Read John 7:40-53. What happens when the temple police return without Jesus and what does the conversation that follows reveal about the religious leaders? Were they about truth or maintaining power? How might this same dynamic occur today?

Application

1. What would you say are the marks of someone who is searching for water to satisfy? Do you see any of those marks in your own life? If yes, what do you need to do or change?

2. How does religion confuse and distract people around you from really understanding and receiving Jesus?

3. What can you do to help people who are religious to see Jesus? What are some practical ideas?

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