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Scripture Text: Acts 2:1-13

Sermon Title: The Coming of the Holy Spirit: *The Pentecostal Difference*

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The Coming of the Holy Spirit: *The Pentecostal Difference*

Introduction:

Open your Bibles with me to Acts 2:1-13, as we continue looking this month in the first two chapters of The Acts of the Apostles, or what we might prefer to call “The Acts of Jesus through the Church” (based on the first verse of this second of Luke’s two volumes).

Today we look at one of the “fulcrum” passages in Acts, which are milestones in the life of the first church (See Darrell Bock, page 92, *Acts, Baker ECNT*). The Holy Spirit was no stranger to the disciples, upon whom Jesus had breathed the Spirit in the upper room on the evening of his resurrection (John 20:22). But on the Day of Pentecost, the fiftieth day after Passover, one of the pilgrimage harvest festivals in Jerusalem, the Holy Spirit came upon the church in great power, as Jesus had promised (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4-5). The 120-plus disciples had obediently been praying and preparing for the coming of the Holy Spirit’s fullness/baptism for some ten days in the upper room and probably also in the temple courts. The coming of the Holy Spirit was the event that empowered and launched the church for its mission to take the gospel to the world.

The phenomena of Pentecost are historic and unrepeatable, just as were the events of Calvary and the Resurrection of Jesus. But, as with Calvary and the Empty Tomb,

the results and the principles of Pentecost remain to this day and are vital to the life of the believer and the church. Follow as I read...

Acts 2:1-13

Acts is not just a history of the first church, but brings us face to face with the reality of how God is working and seeking to work in and through his church today. Yes, the outward phenomena were given uniquely in that first century time, but there are vitally important principles and experiences that God has for us today, without which we cannot join him in "The Acts of Jesus" in this 21st Century. God's word is still as alive as ever, and he has not changed.

G Campbell Morgan (1863-1945), who was recognized as the "Prince of Expositors" in his native England as well as in America, said this about the principles of Pentecost for today's church:

"There has been no lessening of the resources. It is such a commonplace thing to say (that we have 'limitless resources in the world's Redeemer'), and we all agree; but do we really believe it? Have we not some kind of subconscious heresy in our minds that Pentecost is passed, and that Pentecostal power has weakened in the process of the centuries?" (Page 35, G C Morgan, *The Acts of the Apostles*).

Good methods of marketing, efficient organizing and the best intellect and facilities may produce church growth in some places in the world today. But such growth is ersatz and is not indicative of the power of God to change lives, advance his kingdom and bring glory to his name. In a real way, we here in Belgium, where such superficial "church growth" tactics are usually ineffective, have a distinct advantage. We *have* to depend on God if anything happens of significance. We know we must depend on the power of God and we desperately need the Pentecostal power of God to break through the barriers of spiritual darkness and indifference created by centuries of impotent religious formality and nominalism and now dominated by post-Christian paganism.

What can we as followers of Jesus expect from the Pentecostal difference, from the coming of the Holy Spirit upon us with great power? We have already acknowledged that the Holy Spirit is within every true disciple, every follower of Jesus Christ (Romans 8:9). Perhaps it is true, that we don't need to "get" more of the Holy Spirit, as though he were an impersonal entity that our bodies contain, such as a "ghost" or fluid. He is the third person of the Trinity, who dwells in our hearts by faith. We don't need more of him, as it were, but rather we need to *let him have more of us*. He is to rule in our lives. But there are degrees to which he can and will bless and use us, and our need is for his fullness of blessing, controlling and using us for his glory. This in-filling is what we see in our text on the Day of Pentecost. Regarding the Pentecostal difference, let's note first of all...

The difference in the church (verses 1-4)

In the first four verses we note the Pentecostal difference within the church. One thing that is clear from reading The Book of Acts is the centrality of the church in the

purposes of God. By church I speak not primarily of the universal church of all believers everywhere but rather of a local entity, a body of believers under the Lordship of Christ. Note that the believers were “all together in one place,” which is the meaning of church. The Greek word that translates into the English word “church” is the compound word ‘ecclesia,’ which literally means “called-out ones.” To receive God’s Pentecostal blessings it is imperative that we relate to the fellowship of the church, where we can receive...

The wind of God: power

Verse 2 says, “Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting.” Some of you may be familiar with twisters/tornadoes, which sound like approaching freight trains. In the upper room there was not the wind but there was a sound like the blowing of a violent wind. This was a sign to the believers that God’s Spirit was coming upon them in great power.

Just before his ascension back into heaven, Jesus promised that his disciples would receive power when the Holy Spirit would come upon them (Acts 1:8). Paul later spoke of this “incomparably great power for us who believe.” And, he says, “That power is like the working of his (God’s) mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms” (Ephesians 1:19-20).

Both the Hebrew word (ruach) and the Greek word (pneuma) used for the Spirit of God are also the words for wind, the powerful creative, not destructive, force of God. In the beginning of creation, “the Spirit/wind of God was hovering over the waters” (Genesis 1:1-2). The angel Gabriel explained to the young virgin, Mary, that when she would conceive of the Messiah “the Holy Spirit (pneuma) will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you” (Luke 1:35). Thus in that upper room on the Day of Pentecost the believers began to realize that the mighty power of God, sounding like a mighty tornado, was coming upon them.

These disciples realized their need for the power of God upon their lives in view of the overwhelming task before them. Apart from God’s power they were totally unable to face the hostile world and carry the mandate of their Master. They had been well-meaning but weak and wavering before Pentecost. They had cowered before Jesus’ enemies and they themselves were fearful of an unknown future.

The older I get the more I realize my weakness and the utter futility of my best resolve and intentions apart from the power of God to keep on making me into a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17). I need God’s power to protect me from the evil one and to enable me to stand firm on the evil day (Ephesians 6:10-13). Only the Holy Spirit can produce in my life the much-needed graces of godliness Paul calls the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22f).

And the need of the church is for the power of God, to empower our worship, witness and service for Christ. We can “cruise along” with human power and organizational efficiency and business savvy. But to do true Kingdom work we must have the power of God. For there to be power in our preaching, service and witness here in

IBC, we depend absolutely on the Holy Spirit. And we need the Pentecostal power that came upon the first believers and that has come during periods of true revival and periods of awakening.

My study of revivals and awakenings, such as at Pentecost and in the 18th Century Great Awakening in England and America, indicate that only in these extraordinary periods of history were great sinners greatly converted in great numbers. And the spiritual condition of Western Europe tells me that better methods and marketing and more persuasive evangelistic tactics won't get the job done. What is needed in this land is a mighty movement of the power of God, one that will move hearts from hardness to conviction of sin and from indifference to genuine repentance (John 16:8-11).

Not only did the disciples on the Day of Pentecost hear the wind of God's power, but also they saw...

The fire of God: purity

Upon every believer "what seemed to be tongues of fire" separated and came to rest on each of them (verse 3). When the Holy Spirit comes upon us in fullness he comes upon those made pure by the blood of Christ. A condition for the fullness of God is surrender to the Lordship of Christ, who demands our holiness before him. He will not fill an unclean vessel and when he comes he brings even greater purity and he drives out every remaining vestige of un-confessed, un-abandoned sin.

This is what we see in the commission of the Prophet Isaiah, who meets the holiness of God in the temple. He is made aware of his uncleanness and cries out, "Woe to me!...I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty." Then the seraph flew to him and touched his lips with a live coal from the altar, in order to remove his guilt and sin (Isaiah 6:5-7).

When the Holy Spirit comes in fullness, the first thing he will do is cleanse our tongues and all of our lives with the fire of his presence. As someone noted, we will have either tongues of the fire of heaven or we will have the tongues of set on fire by hell (James 3:6). The tongue seems to be the thermometer, the indicator of our condition. As Jesus said, what comes out of our mouths is what corrupts us, not what goes into our mouths; and what comes out of our mouths, off of our tongues, is what is in our hearts (Mark 7:14-23). We thus need clean hearts that give rise to clean tongues and speech. When Pentecost comes to our lives we will have a new way of speaking.

A member of our former church was converted while working in the oil fields in the USA. Oil field workers were noted for their profanity and Bill Brunson was no exception. When Bill was converted to Christ he had to learn an entirely different vocabulary, one that was purged of his usual sprinkling of profanity.

And when the Spirit comes in great power on the church there will be a new way of speaking. No more will there be gossip and rumor mongering. When revival comes

there will no longer be evil speaking of one another. Rather, there will be speech that will be “helpful for building others up,” as Paul admonishes (Ephesians 4:29).

The fire is also an image of the heavenly Shekinah glory of God, such as the fire of the burning bush before Moses, that led the Israelites in the wilderness and that burned on Mount Sinai at the giving of the law (Exodus 3:2; 13:21; 19:18). When the Holy Spirit comes in fullness we too will be aware of his glorious presence. Following a near-fatal accident, the great French physicist-mathematician and religious philosopher Blaise Pascal (1623-1662) described his subsequent vision from God, with large capital letters, spelling “F-I-R-E, God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.”

The speech of God: proclamation

When God’s presence comes to our lives and into our church in fullness, it will be obvious. People will hear the sound of joy and see the fire of God’s glorious presence and hear the speech of God from the people, speaking the words of God that communicate with those around us. This speech “in other tongues” was not the glossalia that had created division within the Corinthian church and needed controls and interpretation (1 Corinthians 14). This was a unique phenomenon that enabled the church to miraculously speak “the wonders of God” in the languages and dialects of all of the Jews who were in Jerusalem during this Pentecost pilgrimage feast. There was then and there will be an obvious difference in this church from anything else around us when the Holy Spirit comes in fullness.

I think of the country church in my home country whose wooden frame building caught fire early one Sunday. Not having a fire truck in this remote part of the country, the only way to fight the fire was to form a bucket brigade, passing buckets of water from a well to the building, where the water would be thrown on the fire in a desperate attempt to save the building. Joining in this brigade was a lapsed member, who had not attended worship service for years. The deacon next to this lapsed member remarked pejoratively, “Well, Bill! This is the first time I’ve seen you in church for a long time!” to which Bill replied, “Yes, because it’s been a long time since this church has been on fire.”

And if we are on fire by the Spirit of God, filling our lives, our worship and our ministries, people will come to see the fire burn and to hear the noise of God’s presence and the word of his truth. And because Pentecost makes a difference in the church the coming of the Spirit in fullness also makes all of...

The difference in the world (verses 5-13)

The setting in Jerusalem was during the Passover Feast, when thousands of pilgrims “from every nation under heaven” (verse 5) had swelled the size of the city during the celebration of this major harvest festival. The people outside the upper room had heard the sound and came to hear the 120 disciples speaking “the wonders of God” (verse 11) in their own language (literally, dialect, verse 6). No wonder they were “bewildered” and “utterly amazed” (verses 6&7).

The church that has experienced the Pentecostal difference cannot keep this experience to itself. In fact, every believer who is filled with the Holy Spirit will not keep his blessing and new life to himself but will have a divine compunction and constraint to share Jesus and his love with others. Even under threat by the ruling Jewish court, Peter and John and the disciples later courteously declined to obey the order to remain silence and to cease preaching about Jesus:

“Judge for yourselves,” said Peter and John to the Sanhedrin, “whether it is right in God’s sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:19-20). Here on the Day of Pentecost we see the disciples...

Communicating the witness of God

These disciples were miraculously communicating the gospel of Jesus, the “wonders of God” (verse 11) in the languages and dialects of all the people gathered in Jerusalem. This was a bewildering and amazing phenomenon because the disciples were obviously, by their accent, identified as Galileans. The good news of Jesus was being shared...

By ordinary people

The disciples were identified as somewhat less than sophisticated Galileans, who generally spoke only Aramaic, the language of the common people. At most they might also know Greek, but certainly not be able to speak the language of all the Jews gathered from around the entire civilized world where the Jews had been scattered during the Diaspora (See John B Polhill, pages 100-102, *Acts: an Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, NAC).

To try to capture some of the wonder of this phenomena, think of about a million of you people from Europe and other parts of the world who are multi-lingual, going to Nashville, Tennessee, USA on a pilgrimage. Of course, most Americans know and speak only English. But all of a sudden you hear a loud noise, gather to see what happened and then you hear some American speaking to you in your African dialect, or in French, Russian or Arabic, and on and on. And these Americans are ordinary folks, not university graduates, but working class people whose only claim is to know Jesus Christ and have seen him before his ascension back to heaven. In this imaginary picture each of you has some American you have never seen before coming up to you and speaking about Jesus and the wonders of God in your native language or dialect. Now that would be a miracle!

The Book of Acts is the record of ordinary people that God uses, which is always his modus operandi, as we see later in Acts (4:13) and in Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians (1:18ff). Paul had to contend with the pride of the Corinthians who thought that God preferred the sophisticated Gnostics, who prided themselves in their attainment of special spiritual knowledge.

The only problem I see for many of you being used of God in a mighty way is that you are overqualified. You are so capable and highly educated you might tend to think you can serve God on your own power and with your own intelligence and

persuasiveness rather than relying totally on God. God reveals his strength and greatness by using weak instruments who depend absolutely on him. Stronger and more capable people tend to forget to rely totally on God and also may tend to not give God all of the credit and glory for what he does through them.

While I was at home from the hospital recuperating, I called my faithful prayer supporter, Annette Myburgh, and told her about my mild heart attack and the angioplasty procedure that followed. "O, good!" she exclaimed, which was not the sympathetic response I was expecting. She went on to say, "Now IBC will be even more blessed by your preaching because you will be more dependent on the anointing of the Holy Spirit!" And I hope that's been true.

But these believers on the Day of Pentecost were filled with the Spirit and thus compelled to communicate the wonders of God...

To every culture

There in the city of Jerusalem were the thousands from every identifiable location in the world where the Jews had been scattered during the Diaspora (the expulsion of Jews from Israel, beginning with the exiles during the Old Testament period). These pilgrims represented every significant settlement of Jews from what is modern day Iran to Italy, from northern Turkey to southern Saudi Arabia and across North Africa (See Polhill, above citation, pages 102f).

The miracle of languages on the Day of Pentecost was a one-time phenomenon that expressed God's plan to take the gospel of Jesus Christ to every culture, nation, tribe, language and people group (Mark 13:10; Revelation 7:9).

When I served on the board of trustees of a large denomination's mission sending agency there was a strengthened emphasis on the language requirements of missionaries. Previously, if a missionary were going to a Franco-phone African country, she could learn French in language school in France and then go to her assignment in Burkina Faso and pick up the African dialect later. Now there is a much stricter requirement to master the tribal dialect, to be able to share the gospel and make disciples in the heart language of the people. Sharing language is essential to sharing one's life with the people and crossing an important cultural barrier.

Any church and any individual who is filled with the Holy Spirit will do all he can and all she can to cross every barrier to reach the heart of those who need to know the good news and receive the love of Jesus. As Paul said, "I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some" (1 Corinthians 9:22). We don't expect those we are seeking to win to accommodate themselves to us; rather, we adjust in order to make them more comfortable around us and trusting of us. Often we "package" the gospel in our own cultural wrappings, which make the gospel seem "American" or even "Western European," thus causing an unnecessary and unscriptural disconnect with people, who naturally identify with their own culture, of which language is only a part.

I never will forget my dismay and disappointment when I visited a worship service in a village outside of Accra, Ghana. I knew from a music professor in the university in the US city where I was pastor at the time that Ghana is home of the greatest percussionists in the world. This professor was the lead percussionist in the local symphony orchestra and he took his university students each year to Accra just to have them taught their distinctive rhythmic artistry. Thus I visited the worship service to enjoy the music, which surely would feature great drumming. However, the American missionary, who was a music ministry graduate of a US Baptist seminary, had totally Americanized the worship service, leading the service from a piano, which she probably had brought with her to Africa. The entire music service seemed unnatural and strained, to say the least.

And here in IBC, with our 40-50 different nationalities and even more cultures represented each week, we must be sensitive to our great cultural diversity and not let our own cultural practices impose our prejudices and expectations on others. If we do, we will unnecessarily impose barriers to the good news of Jesus Christ, who is Savior of *all* who believe. We must be willing to be flexible to keep the doors of the gospel open to others, who have a different way of speaking, dressing, and even kissing and touching one another, practices which may make us personally uncomfortable.

Notice how these first disciples communicated to the people of these various cultures...

The wonders of God

Our text says that these believers declared to the multi-cultural multitude “the wonders (“mighty works,” ESV) of God” (verse 11). This is what the good news is all about—the greatness of God as revealed in his word. The world doesn’t want to know our intricate theology about God, but rather they need to consider *what a mighty God we know*. They need to know what God, the Creator, has done for us in Jesus Christ, his Son. His great salvation for all who believe is his mightiest work and is a work that has the power to change the life of all who will believe. Like Paul, we need to be confident that the gospel “is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16). Whatever we think of the likelihood of someone’s salvation, we need to remember that “what is impossible with men is possible with God” (Luke 18:27).

Only as the gospel has changed and is changing your life do you have the authority to commend it to others. This doesn’t mean that you have to be perfect to share the good news about Jesus with others. It means you simply have to have a first hand experience of his love, forgiveness and power in your life. In fact, you share out of your weakness, ordinariness and even your suffering to connect with others. They will relate to your weakness and failure more often than with your success and strength. What others long for is a relationship with God and others that will make a practical as well as an eternal difference in their lives. They need to hear from a loving, caring friend about a God who is willing and able to help them, about a God of wonderful love and power.

And the disciples who communicated this witness were...

Causing different responses

When the Holy Spirit comes in great power upon his church, there will be “great sinners, greatly converted in great numbers.” When I studied in seminary the history of spiritual awakenings, we noted that the Spirit of God is at work constantly and consistently. Even during periods of spiritual dryness when little seems to be happening in the churches, God is always at work drawing people to Christ. But during seasons of revival, “mini-Pentecosts,” as it were, those who had been resistant or worse, totally indifferent, come under the convicting work of the Holy Spirit and are dramatically converted (John 16:8).

What is true for the church in seasons of revival is true of the individual believer who lives in the full anointing and power of the Holy Spirit. Through your life and witness there will be favorable responses...

Among the receptive

When the Holy Spirit is present and working in great power, the curiosity and even the interest of many of the unconverted will be aroused. This is due to the powerful working of the Holy Spirit (John 16:8) and not because we have acquired unusual eloquence, persuasiveness or argumentative powers. No one is brought into the kingdom through losing a debate or argument.

In my experience of sharing the gospel I am always amazed how little my ability or performance contributes to anyone who is truly converted. I have led people to pray to receive Christ by carefully following a scripted gospel presentation. However, I'm not so sure that all of these people who assented to my presentation and questions were truly converted by the Spirit of God. I've also noticed that when convicting power is at work in the hearts of those receptive to the gospel message, I become almost unnecessary, except for joining alongside them, as Philip did the Ethiopian official, and participate in the God-led discussion (Acts 8:26-39).

When you are walking in the fullness of the Spirit, God will bring people into your pathway who are receptive to the gospel and you will find yourself sharing with freedom and boldness in a natural, unforced way. But you also will find yourself sharing the gospel and receiving a different response...

Among the rejecters

In our closing verse we see that even the most powerful witness failed to move the hearts of skeptical unbelievers. As with the witnesses of Lazarus' resurrection, there is even a heightening of opposition (John 11:45ff). Even though their reasoning was not plausible (as Peter would immediately point out in his sermon, verse 15), it was a desperate if futile attempt to discredit the message they were unwilling to hear.

During the history of great awakenings and revivals there are always critics, even within the church, that try to discredit the mighty workings of God (I think of the clergy during the Great Awakening who banned Whitefield and the Wesleys from preaching in the Anglican churches because of their “enthusiasm”!). And we should

not be surprised when our witness for Jesus is rejected and even scorned by those closest to us (Luke 12:49-53). To be misunderstood and rejected by those for whom we yearn to lead to Christ is part of the suffering we share with Christ, who said we would share in his sufferings, the sufferings of the one who was despised and rejected by many (John 15:18ff; Isaiah 53:3).

The Spirit-empowered believer and church is a threat to the resistant unbeliever and so they will *willfully* misunderstand us in order to keep the power of God at “an arm’s length.” Although we cannot control their response to us they cannot keep us from praying for them. And we must do all we can to keep a connection with them in the hope that in God’s time Christ will lead them to himself. It’s likely that within this initial group of scoffers there were some who came to Christ following Peter’s sermon or perhaps years later, following the power-filled witness of the Spirit-filled church.

Conclusion:

Again, I come back to that question from G Campbell Morgan. Do we really believe that the resources of God today, for your life and mine as well as for IBC Brussels, are as limitless and available as on the Day of Pentecost? Or are we guilty of the “subconscious heresy” that “Pentecost power has weakened”? As Morgan then says, “The resources are as limitless now as they were in the dawning of that great day. The question for our hearts should be: Is Christ limited in us?” And so the preacher says, “If He is limited because we grieve or quench the Spirit, then it is necessary that judgment should begin at the House of God. We must repent, renounce, return” (above citation).

It is essential that we meet the conditions of preparation, which include being united in love and right before God and with one another. It means we must be willing to let go of known yet un-confessed sin and to submit our will to the heavenly Father. Without this repentance before God and returning to him in obedience we cannot expect his spiritual power in our lives. And it’s quite possible that one person, even as in the case of Achan in the Old Testament, can quench or grieve the Spirit and cause the spiritual defeat of an entire church (Joshua 7; 22:20).

Much is at stake when we think of the Pentecostal difference. I pray that we will all meet the conditions for that difference in our lives and in our church. In fact, of all people in all places, IBC Brussels should be aware of our need for the Pentecostal difference. We realize that better marketing and slicker methods are futile in this environment, where people don’t care about our “product” in the first place. What is needed is the power of God’s Spirit to create the hunger for God and for relationships that alone can satisfy the deepest desires of the people that surround us in this culture. And also, in the expatriate community are countless people seeking rooted-ness and connected-ness with meaningful, satisfying relationships. We have the answer in Christ and in his fellowship of acceptance and love—the church. And some of us have spiritual issues in our lives that need to be resolved by the in-filling of the Holy Spirit. Many of our relationship and emotional difficulties arise from the fact that we are children of God who are now by our new nature to live

by the power of the Holy Spirit. When we try to live the Christian life in the power of our strength and resources the result will be frustration and spiritual defeat.

Right now you can receive the fullness of the Holy Spirit, if you are willing to release control of your own life to your self-centered will and follow Jesus in the way of the cross, which means death to self. You must now, in a spirit of true repentance, turn from all known sin in your life and resolve to “put on the Lord Jesus” by letting him produce in you the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Romans 13:14; Galatians 5:21f). In faith that God desires his “best gift” for you and that he will honor your faith and obedience, ask him right now to fill you with his Holy Spirit (Matthew 7:11; Luke 11:11-13; Matthew 21:22). You may not have an amazingly emotional experience, but you can affirm the presence of the promised Holy Spirit by faith and you can begin living with a new awareness of his presence in you. You can and must walk with Jesus in a spirit of prayerful dependence on him and fellowship with him.

Join me in praying for and seeking after the coming of the Holy Spirit in all of his fullness, this greatest of all gifts that the heavenly Father has promised (Matthew 7:7-11; Luke 11:9-13).

Thoughts and questions for personal reflection and/or group discussion:

1. The Holy Spirit came upon the church in fullness of power on the Day of Pentecost, accompanied by unusual phenomena, which were never repeated. What do you think was symbolized by the sound of a violent wind? The tongues of fire? The speaking in other tongues (languages)?
2. When do you believe a Christian receives the Holy Spirit? When and how do you believe a Christian is filled with the Holy Spirit?
3. What difference does being filled with the Holy Spirit make in someone’s life?
4. Have you been filled with the Holy Spirit and are you right now?
5. What difference does it make in the life, fellowship, worship and ministry of a church for its members to be filled with the Holy Spirit?
6. What responses should we expect when we faithfully share the good news about Jesus with the unconverted?
7. What should our reaction be when people respond to our witnessing efforts with rejection or even ridicule?

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