

Russell Kelfer

The Pearl of Great Price

#1359-B

Series: The Parables of Scripture



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Note: Russell wrote each of these lessons in a manner that would enable him to clearly communicate them to his weekly class. The grammar or punctuation you encounter may not be technically perfect, but you will certainly “hear” his unique gift for making the message applicable to the common man in everyday situations.

It’s been said of him that he was really a writer who read his stuff. And that’s a very accurate statement!

May you be richly blessed as you “hear” as you read.

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We are in the process of finding what the kingdom of heaven is like. Our instructor is God Himself. He is sitting in a little fishing boat just off the shore, and His audience is gathered at the edge of the water, listening.

The illustrations are simple, yet profound. They speak of common, everyday issues and people, yet there is an underlying bed of rich, deep spiritual treasure hidden beneath the surface, waiting to be harvested by those who have “ears to hear”.

In our last study, we heard Jesus say that the kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed; its beginnings seem insignificant and are often unnoticed, *but given time*, it becomes like a tree that bears fruit and feeds the birds of the air who flock there to nest. We saw in that parable how God takes insignificant beginnings and through time turns them into greatness which can only bring glory to His precious Name.

This study focuses on two more parables, given back to back by The Master, which teach a common truth. They are found in Matthew 13, beginning with verse 44. It reads:

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field.

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls:

Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.

(Matthew 13:44-46)

There is a common thread woven through those two parables, and it has at its roots more than one Biblical absolute. Even beyond that, they both have at their core a simple statement about our relationship with God that could change our entire understanding of discipleship. We need to read them carefully.

There are several steps taken in these two stories that are

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given to parallel our walk with God. Let's take them one by one.

1- A TREASURE FOUND

In the first illustration, a man was digging in a field, probably preparing to plant something, when he came across a treasure. We don't know what it was, but we know one thing. *He simply had to have it.* The field didn't belong to him. We don't know whose it was, but we know he didn't own it. Not yet. It was an extraordinary treasure, as we shall see in a moment. He dug it up, ran and hid it so no one else could take it from him, and decided to buy the field he found it in, assuming, I suppose, that more treasure awaited him as he continued to dig therein.

In the second illustration, we have a businessman who dealt in fine jewels, who was shopping for pearls. There were many to choose from, but suddenly his eye fell on one. Like the man in the first illustration, *he simply had to have it.* Whatever it took, that pearl was worth the cost.

So our study begins with the finding of something that we didn't have before. We don't know exactly what its value is, but we know it's something of greater value than we have ever come across before. Because of that, we have to make some decisions. The cost factor to purchase or obtain or own what we have found is far beyond what we would normally pay for anything. This is not a trinket we found to add to our collection. This would *be* the collection. This would, in effect, *be everything.*

Have you ever found such a treasure? Has there ever been a time in your life when you came across something so rare, so priceless, that you would virtually give away everything you own just to have it? You have, if you are a Christian. You have found the treasure of the Christian life. You have found the pearl of great price. The price to own it has been paid, but the price to possess it in all of its fullness involves a decision. No, make that *a series of decisions.* And those decisions are costly ones, for the process of possession carries with it a progression of choices, each one requiring a greater level of commitment than the one before.

2- THE COST OF OWNERSHIP

The key element in this parable, then, involves what the treasure cost. The man possessed the treasure, but it only whet his appetite for what he might own if he dug for more. So he

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knew beyond a shadow of a doubt, that he had to buy the whole parcel of land. The problem was one of simple economics. He didn't have on hand what it took to purchase it.

The man went home and decided to count the cost. He considered the value of all his possessions: his home, his horse, his tools, his bank account. Guess what? Everything he owned put together would be needed to buy the land. *He would have to sell everything he possessed in order to possess the one thing he wanted.* In essence, he was transferring ownership of his whole life for one parcel of land.

This made the decision the most important one he had ever made. He had to forsake *all that he had*. Doesn't that sound familiar?

The merchant shopping for fine jewels was in a similar predicament. He had, perhaps, been a jewelry dealer for years. He no doubt traveled the country looking for gems he could make into necklaces or bracelets. His goal was to find the most exquisite stones in the country. He searched far and wide, ran down every lead. One day, as he was scanning a group of beautiful gemstones, his eye fell on one pearl. All of his life he had dreamed of finding something like this. The richness, the size, the depth; it had to be the most beautiful pearl in all the world.

He asked what it would cost. As expected, the price was staggering. Like the treasure-hunter in the first parable, he had to determine *how badly he wanted it*. He, too, took inventory of his possessions. He must have added up the value of his entire collection of rare jewels, then taken stock of his personal belongings, trying to determine what he could get if he sold everything, *even at a loss*. He added it all up. And once again, sure enough, he could buy the pearl, *but only if he was willing to give up everything he owned to have it*. The parable says that he counted the cost, paid the price, and traded everything he owned for that one incredible pearl.

3- THE SOURCE OF THE MOTIVATION

Perhaps the most interesting word in the parable, however, is the one that describes the motivation of the man who sold everything he had to buy a parcel of land which contained a treasure he perceived to be beyond measure in value. It reads like this:

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...for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field.

He sold everything he had for the sake of the joy thereof. He gave up his most prized possessions, and counted it all joy. Think about that word “joy”. It is the Greek word “chara”. It is used 59 times in the New Testament, 51 of them translated “joy”.

A quick run through those passages will teach us a few things about what joy is and what produces it. It may surprise you, but it ought to set the stage for better understanding what this parable is really all about. We tend to think of joy as a response to something good. We rejoice when everything turns out okay. We rejoice when we get a raise at work. We rejoice when the children get passing grades. We rejoice when the car starts on a cold morning. At least that’s what we say. That may not, however, be at all a reflection of what joy is. In fact, true joy might better be demonstrated if we *didn’t* get that raise, if the children *needed* help, if the car *didn’t* start. Then, if we had God’s mind, we would have a basis to demonstrate the joy of the Lord, *for the joy of the Lord is a constant reflection of His character that reveals itself even in the midst of circumstances that otherwise might not produce happiness*. Joy is a reflection of that which is spiritual, not that which is circumstantial. It is, in fact, a fruit of the Spirit. Example:

1- Persecution is a cause for joy. No one in his right mind, in the flesh would rejoice over being taken advantage of or unjustly accused or even punished for his faith. The Scripture, however, indicates that we not only can, we must.

Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you *from their company*, and shall reproach *you*, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man’s sake.

Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward *is* great in heaven: for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets. (Luke 6:22,23)

Like the man in the Toyota ad, you can leap for joy when you are wrongly accused or persecuted; when your reputation is wrongfully destroyed because of your faith. Why? Because *great is your reward in heaven*. In the spirit realm, you are being rewarded. You have been given a prize. You have been assured of a commendation from the King. That’s reason to rejoice. You aren’t rejoicing over the grief, or the shame, or the rejection. You

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are rejoicing over the spiritual victory that is being won as a result of the physical or emotional beating you have taken. Leap for joy, beloved! That's what you are commanded to do; therefore, that's *what you are expected to do*.

2- Tribulation and testing actually produce joy. Look at these verses. They are very familiar, but look at them again, seeking only to see the meaning and source of joy:

Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you:

But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. (I Peter 4:12,13)

My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations;

Knowing *this*, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.

But let patience have *her* perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. (James 1:2-4)

Count it all joy when the sky falls, James is saying. Don't be surprised when your world goes up in flames, Peter is saying. God is simply sending you, in a container of tribulation, the ingredients that produce joy. Let it happen. Don't fight it. Grab hold of it instead. It will produce in you a patient spirit; it will perfect your heart and transform your soul. Therefore, count it all joy.

3- Spiritual victories produce joy.

And the seventy returned again with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name. (Luke 10:17)

I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance. (Luke 15:7)

For what *is* our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? *Are* not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?

For ye are our glory and joy. (I Thessalonians 2:19,20)

The seventy returned with joy. Why? Because they had experienced no problems? No. They had been in hand-to-hand combat with the enemy, but they had experienced for the first time real spiritual victory. In Luke 15:7, one sinner has repented.

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The angels sing a chorus of joy. Why? God's singular purpose for redemption has been fulfilled. Someone has been born again. Oh, that we on earth would get as excited as the angels do. They are filled with joy.

Paul is writing to the Thessalonican church explaining joy. He says "joy is not the response to pleasant circumstances; joy is the response to spiritually-changed lives." Those lives literally produce joy, often through great anguish and pressure.

4- Joy is eternal. It cannot be taken from you. Not by people. Not by circumstances.

And ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you. (John 16:22)

But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God. (Acts 20:24)

Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of *our* faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12:2)

No man can take your joy from you. Almost anyone can steal away your happiness. The tailor can ruin your only suit. The mechanic can tell you that you need a new engine. The accountant can tell you he made a mistake on your taxes. The boss can tell you the company's been sold. Circumstantially, you are crushed. Emotionally, you are tempted to self-pity, anger, despondency or depression. But neither the tailor nor the mechanic nor the accountant nor your boss can take your joy from you.

Your joy no man taketh from you. (John 16:22)

Why not? Because your joy is an internal expression of the Spirit of God and *the very things that would destroy your happiness actually activate the joy of the Lord*. We won't understand that fully until, like Paul, we can honestly testify:

None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself so that I might finish my course with joy. (Acts 20:24)

Jesus said that the one who found the treasure was filled with joy at the prospect of losing everything if it meant gaining ownership of that field where the treasure was discovered. The

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source of his joy was not the losing of everything, but the value of the exchange. He actually was filled with joy because what he found was infinitely more valuable to him than what he was giving up. We shall, I pray, come in a moment to see why that statement is such an important part of this parable.

4- THE RELINQUISHING OF EVERYTHING FOR ONE THING

The fourth part of the puzzle comes from understanding that phrase that appears in both parables. It is this: In the case of the one who found the treasure it says: “for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath”. In the case of the pearl of great price, it says: he went “and sold all that he had.”

I trust you get the gist of the magnitude of what that means. Think about it. Is there anything in the world of such value to you that you would gladly sell *every single thing you possess*? This phrase is key, however, to the meaning of the parable. Had either man gone and sold *some of their possessions*, it would have been an interesting story, but the deeper meaning would not have been the same. The spiritual application would have been entirely different. It’s much more than a matter of degrees.

The difference between selling half of their possessions or two-thirds of their possessions would have been a matter of degree, but the willingness of both men to sell *all* is a different matter. Now there is no picking and choosing what to give up. Either this is something of such value that nothing else matters, or it’s not. If it is, the decisions have all been made. Whatever comes between you and that treasure; whatever stands between you and that pearl is expendable. Yea, it is more than expendable, it is as good as gone. The title has been transferred. If you have it to use after that, it is only God’s grace that He has so privileged you. It is no longer yours.

“All” is one of those words you don’t really have to hassle over. It is like “none” or “never” or “every”. It is a door that is either open or shut. You find no place in the Bible and no place in the dictionary where all means less than everything. When someone says “Here, take it all”, you don’t need to pick and choose. Yet, we believers use the word so often in a relative sense without realizing it.

We sing, “All to Jesus I surrender, All to Him I freely give.” Then we belt out the chorus, “I surrender all, I surrender all.”

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What a noble gesture. About five minutes later, you leave the church and someone violates what you consider “your rights”. Maybe someone has your car blocked in the parking lot. Maybe your mate asks you to do something you don’t want to do. How dare they? That’s *my* car. It’s *my* time. It’s *my* privilege. But, didn’t you give Jesus the rights to all of your possessions; all of your minutes; all of your choices? Well, yes and no, you respond. Not that!

Then we shouldn’t really sing that hymn. All means all. And all is what God is asking for. The one who found the treasure and the one who found the pearl understood. It was all or nothing. They couldn’t say “all” and then pretend to buy the thing they always wanted with less than what it cost. To buy it, they had to give up everything, *and that was the decision they made.*

The concept of taking or giving “all that he hath” is not a new one. Remember Job 1? This was the conversation between Satan and God.

Then Satan answered the LORD, and said, Doth Job fear God for nought?

Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land.

But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face.

And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand. So Satan went forth from the presence of the LORD.

(Job 1:9-12)

The battle had begun, and Satan had a battle plan. It was to ask God permission to tempt man by, in essence, taking *all that he had* as a test to prove that God was not really the Lord of his life. Satan’s argument was that even though Job was God’s favorite, *if it meant giving up everything*, Job would forget he ever knew God and curse Him to His face.

God, of course, knew Satan’s battle plan and thought it was a good idea. You heard me, God thought it was a good idea, or He never would have allowed it. It broke God’s heart to see Job lose everything, but God knew Job’s heart, and He knew that on the other side of the trial, Job would come out pure gold. So He

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okayed Satan's seemingly vicious attack. From the beginning, the issue would be: "Are you willing to trade anything, or even everything if need be, for a closer walk with your God?" Or, given a choice, no matter how subtle or how overt, will you opt for better circumstances at the expense of knowing God with all your heart?

Jesus was trying to communicate this principle to His somewhat bewildered disciples in Luke, chapter 14. He was trying to communicate that the Christian life would not be a picnic, but a battlefield, and He wasn't looking for spectators, but for warriors. If that was true, He concluded, each one of us had better count the cost. This is what He said:

And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.

For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have *sufficient* to finish *it*?

Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish *it*, all that behold *it* begin to mock him,

Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish.

Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand?

Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace.

So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple. (Luke 14:27-33)

There you have it. Real disciples have to be cross-bearers. Real disciples have to count the cost, and the cost would be simple, but impossible to the natural mind. To be a disciple, Jesus concluded, you have to be willing to forsake *all that you have* or else.

Or else what? Or else you cannot be His disciple. All? All! Not even most; all. Otherwise, you will find yourself in the middle of the battlefield of life without all the armor on, and you just might get wounded. You won't lose your (eternal) life. That's guaranteed. But you could lose lots of victories along the way.

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The totally-surrendered Christian life, beloved, is not a pipe dream. It is a treasure, prepared for you to uncover as you dig for the gold of God's will on planet earth. The problem is: should you, in your quest for a deeper walk, uncover this life of unlimited commitment, and should you see it as something you really can take hold of, *are you willing, if need be, to give up all that you have*, in order to obtain it? Are you willing to forsake everything for something that makes everything look like nothing? Then the treasure is yours for the taking, beloved. The treasure is yours.

Your motivation? The joy that will be yours when you look into God's eyes and hear Him say, "Well done thou good and faithful servant". Jesus went to that cross *for the joy that was set before Him*. The man who found the hidden treasure sold everything he had for *the joy that was set before him*.

Joy is that measure of God's nature that permeates your life with confidence in His sovereignty, always allowing you to rejoice even in the midst of the very same circumstances that would cause the world to cringe and cry. As you experience that joy, God floods your soul with extra grace, and you grow in ever increasing splendor into His likeness.

Beloved, the life of surrender is the pearl of great price. As we rummage through life's garbage dumps looking for happiness in financial success or in the world's acclaim or even in the plaudits of religious men and women, we tend to grab for anything that looks remotely like a gem worth having, only to find that, when we examine it under the lens of God's word, there are flaws that render each one useless in the life to come.

Then one day, a light dawns. Your eyes are scanning the jewelry store of eternity and you see, seemingly for the first time, the most beautiful pearl you have ever seen. Everything about it is perfect. It radiates love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance. You see your own reflection as you gaze upon it. And you suddenly see that reflection change *into what you can become if you become totally surrendered to God's will and God's life*.

Quietly, gently, Jesus leans over and whispers: "Do you like what you see? Is that what you want? You can have it, you know."

"Yes, Lord," you answer, "That's what I want". The Master looks intently into your eyes and whispers: "Then all you have to

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do is forsake all that you have and follow Me”.

“Do what?” we exclaim. “Lord, you don’t understand. I’ve been a Christian for ten years. I’ve been active. I’ve been faithful. But, Lord, I can’t give up my career. I’m just now getting to the top. I’ll offer anything but that. Or, Lord, I can’t give up my new home. I waited years to get this house. Don’t ask for that. Or, Lord, I can’t give up my standard of living. I don’t want to go back to wanting. Anything but that.”

Suddenly, you are overwhelmed by the silence in the room. Jesus didn’t argue with you. He just walked away. No, He didn’t *just walk away*. He walked away weeping. It isn’t that He would automatically allow you to lose it all as Job did, *but He could*. He wants no second liens on the title to your life. Either He has clear title or He doesn’t. That, beloved, is one of the key messages of the parables of the pearl and the treasure. Either you forsake all or you don’t.

That word “forsake” in Luke 14 is a crucial word. The Greek word is: **αποτασσομαι** apotassomai {ap-ot-as’som-ahee}.

The literal meaning is “to say goodbye to; to take leave of; to bid farewell”. We think it means “to put in the background and try to use as little as possible”, or “to be willing, if need be, to say goodbye to”. I don’t see that in this passage. A better translation might be:

So, likewise, whoever of you does not bid farewell once and for all to everything and anything that he possesses cannot be my disciple. (Luke 14:33 NKJV)

There is a fine line between being willing to forsake and actually forsaking. We all can say we are willing, but when the moment comes, if we change our minds or vacillate, we never really forsook anything. The command here is to do the forsaking, once and for all.

You have found the pearl of great price. You cannot say to the Master Jeweler, “I like what I see. I think I’ll buy that. I would like to give you everything I have for it, *with the escape clause that I can take back whatever I want whenever I want.*”

That says to God that you approve of His life and you want to experience it, but you want the privilege at any time of trading it back in if the battle gets too rough. You want the right to be in the army when you are on leave, and when the barracks are

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comfortable, but if God decides to send you to the desert or into some kind of hand-to-hand combat with the enemy, you want the right to bail out at a moment's notice.

Most of us go through this process over and over in our Christian experience. We give up the rights to our job, to our clothes, to our cars, to our friendships, to our health, to our bank accounts. But the moment we feel threatened, we take them back. Why? We surrendered those things, *but we didn't forsake them. We can't surrender our rights; we never had them.* When we came to Christ, we traded all of the rights in this kingdom for all of the joys of the kingdom to come, and the kingdom within. To go through the process of magnanimously surrendering the right to our relationships, or our careers, or our good health is presumptuous.

Forsaking something, on the other hand, is once for all walking away and never looking back. That means that if someone or some thing threatens to take from you something the world considers "yours", be it people, possessions, your reputation, or even your life, you don't despair, you don't become anxious, *and you don't stop and give up your rights to it.* You no longer have the right to it. When you came to Christ, you were to forsake it, so from that moment on, everything in this temporal life was on loan to you. That which is on loan carries with it no ownership. The owner has the right of recall at any moment. In your case, you are being asked to forsake *everything*. What a relief. When you know you have given up *everything*, you have an incredible freedom *because you have nothing to lose.*

Now, should God allow something to be taken from you, you are only experiencing God in a new way. He has taken something that was already His, something He allowed you to borrow for a season. That's His privilege, and if you respond properly, *He rewards you with joy in the here and now, and He promises you greater rewards in the kingdom which is to come.*

It is "for the joy thereof" that you give up "all that you have". The joy of the fullness of the life of faith. No man can take *that* from you. No man. And every time God allows something tangible to be taken from you, that joy takes its place, if you let it. Before long you begin to understand what the pearl of great price is all about. It is about being blessed, and you begin to experience that being blessed involves being poor in spirit; it involves mourning,

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meekness, hungering and thirsting for righteousness, being pure in heart. It means being persecuted and reviled, having all manner of evil said about you.

When you get to the place where you understand what that means, you will have found the joy of the Lord, and *then you will begin to fully understand what it means to have nothing in life that matters but Jesus*. Nothing. You won't be giving up rights because you will have none. But, oh, what you will have will be worth it all.

Are you willing, once and for all, to acknowledge that knowing God intimately is *worth whatever it costs*? And are you willing to *forsake all that you have* to be His disciple? Are you willing to leave it all behind and never look back? Are you willing to go wherever God sends you, follow Him wherever He leads you, and joyfully allow Him to take whatever He chooses from you? Then, beloved, rejoice.

You have discovered the kingdom.

You have found the pearl of great price.

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A Challenge to Further Study

1- Read again the parables of the treasure and the pearl. (Mt 13:44-46) Find the similarities and the differences in the two stories.

2- What words or phrases are found in both?

3- Take a concordance and do a word study of the word “joy”. Answer these questions:

a- What are the sources of joy? (How do you get it?)

b- How does it differ from “happiness”?

c- What gave Jesus joy?

4- Write out in your own words (paraphrase) Luke 14:27-33. Make it applicable to your world. Personalize it (insert your own name) as you do.

A Challenge to Further Application

1- As you pray this week, ask God to help you discover or rediscover the pearl of great price.

2- Ask God to show you what forsaking “all that you have” really means.

3- Make a list of the things in your life to which you have not really surrendered title. These are things, that if the heat were on as it was with Job, you would be likely to argue most with God about and try to hold on to at any price. Write out a title transfer and sign it.

4- Ask God to further reveal to you what the joy of the Lord really is. Expect Him to answer.

A Challenge to Scripture Memory

Memorize Luke 14:27 and 33

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