The Kingdom Grows

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[0:00] This is the First Mustang Pulpit Podcast, a podcast of the weekly preaching and teaching at First Mustang.! Thank you for joining us. Out of town last week at a conference and glad to have him back with us.

If you've got your Bible open with me to Mark chapter 4. While you're finding Mark chapter 4, I want to remind you that on Sunday evenings for our evening service, we meet from 5 to 6 here in the sanctuary.
We are studying through the Lord's Prayer on Sunday nights. We did one of the messages from that last Sunday morning. Just to give you kind of a taste of that, I hope that if you don't normally come on Sunday nights, that you would be back with us at 5 o'clock tonight as we continue our study through the Lord's Prayer.
After service, we'll have our new members over to Mark's house tonight. Look forward to welcoming a very large group of new members to our home as the Lord continues to bless our church and add to our church.
And we're so thankful for the good work that He is doing. Our student ministry had fifth quarter this past Friday night. If you were driving around town and noticed all that was going on here on our campus outside, our youth ministry was providing a safe place for our students, middle school and high schoolers, after the football game Friday night.
[1:28] And it was good to see our students that were there. And you may have noticed some strange things going around the church Thursday and Friday with cameras and drones and all those kinds of things.

We had some guests here with us from Grace Community Church in L.A. and the Master's Seminary. They were down, flew a crew down here, and they were doing some filming with our church, doing a few different things.
But one of the things that they were filming is spotlighting and highlighting our men's institute. Part of our men's institute, we use videos produced from the Master's Seminary professors, and they are highlighting our church and what we do through the institute as a way to be an encouragement to other churches around and trying to encourage them in bringing theological education into our church.
And so, we're excited that we can be a small part, hopefully, of encouraging other churches around the nation to do that. They use a number of our men that were a part of our men's institute.
And so, if you see some guys walking around with shades on today, it's just because they've gone Hollywood on us here the last couple of days. We had a good time with that.
[2:44] Mark chapter 4, we're looking today in verses 21 through 34. Just to remind you of where we were for several weeks, looking in verses 1 to 20, at the parable of the sower, the Lord explained to us that there are different kinds of hearts that hear the gospel.

In the analogy of Mark 4, He likened the hearts to different kinds of soil. Some hear the word, and they have no interest in it. It's just this hardened soil, and it's as if the seed was scattered on it, and the birds just ate it away.
Other seed, it says, falls on rocky soil. And while it may have an initial appearance of response, after you get the persecution of the world and the tribulations of the world, they are exposed as not being true believers.
He talked about a third kind of soil, kind of heart, that receives, here's the word, and it's the kind that has thorns that grow up, and it chokes the word out.
Specifically, he says that these are those who had some kind of initial response to the hearing of the gospel, but their desire for riches and things of the world choke out what was given to them.

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[4:08] And then, fourth and finally, he mentioned to us in this analogy in this parable, of a fourth kind of soil for those who hear the word and accept it.

These are the ones who are truly converted, and they bear fruit. Now, what we remind ourselves of in that parable of the sower is we have to acknowledge that most of the people who hear the gospel are not going to believe.
And even among those who seem to have a favorable response, even many of those are not truly converted. They're just people that have some kind of favorable response, but in the end, they are exposed as not being true believers.
Here is where we take great heart and encouragement, that there are those who will believe. There are those who will hear the word, and they will accept it. And as verse 20 says, they will bear fruit.
Now, right after this comes a series of three parables, three short stories, short illustrations. And I think that these illustrations are here purposefully to, and Mark places them here under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to build on the parable of the sower.
[5:30] Because the parable of the sower ends speaking of those who truly believe. Now, the logical question is, how should we live as those who truly believe?

You could say that while most are on the broad road to destruction, there are those, the few that the gospel says, that are on the narrow road, entering to the narrow gate.
And the question then is, how would those people live? If you're truly a believer, if you've heard the word, you believed it, you accepted it, how ought we to live?
And that's really the issue of these three short parables that are now included. The kingdom is going to grow. And it's very important to understand the juxtaposition that Mark is giving us here.
On the one hand, as you do the hard work of scattering the seed of the gospel, you need to be reminded that most who hear the gospel will not believe.
[6:41] Yet, the kingdom will grow. While most will reject, yet God's kingdom will still survive.

And he will accomplish all that he intends to accomplish. So we see this here in verses 21 through verse 34.
And the first thing I want you to take note of is that we are to spread the light of the gospel. We spread the light of the gospel. Verse 21, He said to them, Is a lamp brought in to be put under a basket or under a bed and not on a stand?
For nothing is hidden except to be made manifest, nor is anything secret except to come to light. If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear.
And he said to them, Pay attention to what you hear. With the measure you use, it will be measured to you, and still more will be added to you. For to the one who has, more will be given.
[7:48] And from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. And he said, The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground.

He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows. He knows not how. The earth produces by itself first the blade, then the ear.
Then the full grain in the ear. But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle because the harvest has come. And he said, With what can we compare the kingdom of God?
Or what parable shall we use for it? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when sown on the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth. Yet, when it is sown, it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and puts out large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.
With many such parables, he spoke the word to them as they were able to hear it. He did not speak to them without a parable, but privately to his own disciples, he explained everything.
[9:00] So the first thing we see is that we are to spread the light of the gospel. When we think of evangelism, we acknowledge both human responsibility and divine sovereignty.

We have a responsibility to pray for people to be saved. We have a responsibility to share the gospel. We have a responsibility to be faithful to the work of evangelism, and we acknowledge that ultimately salvation is of the Lord.
Only God can save a soul. Only God can cause the spiritually dead to be brought to life. And in this short passage, we see examples of both sides of this.
First, he speaks of our responsibility, that we are to spread the light of the gospel. And in verse 21, he says, do you bring a lamp in to put it under a basket?

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Or do you bring a lamp in and hide it under your bed? And the answer, of course, is no. You put the lamp on a stand so that the light can shine.
[10:04] He ended in verse 19 and 20 talking about the reality of the few who truly believe. He goes right now into the responsibility of those who truly believe.

And our responsibility then is to spread the light of the gospel. You don't get a lamp and hide it under the bed. It would be of no value.
The whole purpose of the light that you bring into your house is that it would shine in the darkness. We know that. We understand that's not hard to see.
In the same way, spiritually, we are to let our light shine in the darkness. We're to spread the light of the gospel.
And so Jesus uses this obvious example of doing something you would never do. You would never get a lamp or a candle and put it under your bed. Just as absurd as that would be, it is that equally absurd for those of us who have been saved by the gospel to then keep it to ourselves.
[11:15] A Christian who is not looking for ways to share the gospel would be like somebody who bought a lamp for their house and put the lamp under their bed.

If you went to somebody's house and there were no lights that were on at all and they said, well, we don't have any electricity, but we do have candles, and you say, well, I can't see anything, and they say, well, we lit a bunch of candles.
We just put them under our bed. You would say, I think you've missed entirely what the purpose of the candles are. And that's the exact analogy Jesus uses to remind believers that if you are not involved in the work of evangelism, you've forgotten completely what you're called to do.
And so we're to spread the light of the gospel. This is extremely important here. We have a responsibility to be actively sharing the gospel.
And he says in verse 23, if anyone has ears to hear, let him hear. Pay attention to this, he says. Don't just hear it and go on your way.
[12:35] And you say, well, what does Jesus mean here? If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear. Wouldn't everyone that has ears and can hear, wouldn't they hear? And his point here is obvious.

That you're to hear this in a certain way. Hear it in a way that leads to obedience. You tell your young child, clean your room.
And they walk away and they immediately do something else. And you say as a parent, did you hear me? You're not questioning if they can perceive your words. You're saying, why is it that you did not follow through with what I gave you to do?
That's what Jesus is saying here. If you've been saved, if you are one whose heart was called to spiritual life, there is a follow through to your salvation.
And part of that follow through is to spread the light of the gospel. And while in one sense, everybody in this room hears that, in another sense, the question is, are you going to hear it and obey it?
[13:48] That's what Jesus is getting at here. He who has ears to hear, let him hear. Let him understand. Let him respond. Let him obey.

Spread the light of the gospel. He moves to a second thing that believers should do, and that is that we are to steward the opportunities God gives us.
We steward the opportunities that God gives us. Verse 24, pay attention to what you hear. And with the measure you use, it will be measured to you, and still more will be added to you.
We are to be faithful with the opportunities he gives us. He gives you a measure of opportunities, he gives you a measure of spiritual gifts, he gives you a measure of time, and we are to be faithful with those things.
We're faithful today with what he has given us. We want to be faithful stewards with all he has entrusted to us, and we have an eternity to enjoy the rewards that come from that.
[14:59] But this also reminds us of how important it is that we obey what he says. Pay attention to what you hear, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

There is a reward that is commensurate with your using what he has given to you. Your opportunities, your gifts, your time, your experiences, all our resources God has entrusted to you, and we are to be obedient, to be faithful stewards of all he has given to us.
We spread the light of the gospel, and as we do that, we're faithful stewards of what he has given to us.

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So many times, we get lost in comparisons, and we think to ourselves, I wish I had the gifts of this person, or we'll think to ourselves, I wish I had the platform of this person, or I wish I had the opportunities that this person may have, but what you are accountable to do is be faithful with what he has measured to you.
The spiritual gifts the Holy Spirit has divinely given to you, be faithful with those gifts. You don't need to worry about comparing your gifts to somebody else, or comparing your level of influence to somebody else.
[16:33] Just be faithful with what he has given to you. But do understand that he has given you, if you're a believer, spiritual gifts for the purpose of building up the body of Christ, and part of that is to be faithful to spread the light of the gospel, and to be a faithful steward of all the Lord has given to you.

Whether you are young or old, if you are a believer, you need to be looking for ways to steward what God has given to you.
the conversations you have with people, the way you use your social media, the way that you use your spiritual gifts through service in the body of Christ, the way that you interact with people everywhere you go, always be looking to say, what has God given me today?
What doors are open if I would just have the eyes to see them? What has God given to me if I would just have the ears to listen and to understand? If I would just be faithful to all the Lord has put in front of me?
Be a faithful steward of all that He gives to you. And now, having dealt with the human responsibility, that we are to be faithful to shine the light, we are to be faithful stewards of what He's given to us, He now is going to remind us that not only does evangelism include human responsibility, it absolutely also includes divine sovereignty.
[18:16] And we see a third element here in this passage, and that is that God saves by His grace. God saves by His grace. And I want you to make note of three things.

First, write down the word participation. verse 26, and He said, the kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground.
This is our participation in the work of evangelism. We are to scatter the seed. It's hard work, but we're to persevere in it.
Now, let me just remind you that none of us ought to do the work of evangelism and be met with opposition or discouragement and then give in.
Remember, this comes right on the heels of the parable of the sower where Jesus explains to us that when you scatter the seed of the gospel, most are not going to believe.
[19:20] Most, in the end, are not going to respond in obedience. We know that. So don't ever let the way other people respond to the gospel, don't ever let that be an excuse to stop doing what God's called us to do.

There may be people you have shared the gospel with repeatedly, and they don't believe. There may be conversations you've had, and they have gone very poorly. There may be people in your neighborhood that you have tried to share Christ with, and they never believe.
There may be others that you have shared Christ with, and you thought they were believers. In the end, they were exposed as not being true believers, and you could be tempted to, in despair, say, I'm done with that.
But Jesus is not hiding the reality that this is a hard work that we've been called to do. He's not hiding from us that most of the people you talk to are not going to believe.
He's been very honest with us about that. And yet, in spite of that, verse 26 says, you are to scatter, scatter seed on the ground.
[20:28] This is sharing the hope of the gospel. It can be disappointing work. It can be disheartening work. But we are to participate in the work of evangelism as we scatter the seed of the gospel.

Now, I want you to write down a second one. Write down the word mystery. There's a mystery to how this works. Verse 27. So you have a man who scatters the seed.
He shares the gospel. Verse 27. He sleeps and rises night and day and the seed sprouts and grows and he knows not how.
When you share the gospel, when you do what you've been called to do, then you rest. you sleep.

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It's not your job to save somebody. You can't do that. Only God can do that. It's not your job to ultimately convict of sin or convince of the gospel.
[21:37] Only the Holy Spirit can do that. You scatter the seed. You faithfully participate in the work of evangelism and then this mystery of conversion happens and sometimes it happens in an instant and other times it seems to be the last step in a very long process.

But just as the farmer cannot make the seed grow, so you can't make somebody else believe. Regeneration is God's work.
So, verse 27, he sleeps and he rises night and day and the seed sprouts and grows and he knows not how.
Some of you that have been around a while like me may remember the old hymn says, I know not how the Spirit moves convincing men of sin, revealing Jesus through his word, creating faith in him. I don't know how the Spirit does. It's a mystery. I don't know how the Spirit convinces hearts of sin and creates faith in him. The hymn writer got it exactly right and here's the chorus.
[22:56] Some of you will remember this old song, but I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.

I don't know how the Lord takes our prayers and uses it to bring someone to faith. I don't know how the Lord uses our evangelism and brings a dead heart to life.
I can't explain how or why this person hears the gospel and they walk away. This person hears the gospel and they are humbled unto salvation.
I don't know how the Spirit moves convincing men of sin the hymn writer said, but I do know whom I have believed and I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.
Here's what the hymn writer is saying. I don't know how the Holy Spirit does everything he does, but I know this, I'm going to be faithful to do what he's called me to do and there is eternal reward preserved for me because I heard and obeyed his call.
[24:12] Write down a third word, not only participation and mystery, write down the word sovereignty. Jesus speaks of this in verse 28.

The earth produces by itself first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear.
In other words, there's a growth process that happens. It happens in stages and it takes time. Yes, salvation happens in a moment of time, but it's the result of prayer and teaching and evangelism.
I mean, think of your own salvation. There's a moment where you understood and believed the gospel. There's a moment where you confessed your sin and repented and asked the Lord to save you, but what you can't see are how many people prayed for you before that happened.
How many people had preached the gospel to you before you believed? How many Sunday school teachers had sat with you Sunday after Sunday after Sunday watering that seed?
[25:21] How many grandparents held you in their lap and explained to you the elements of the gospel? How many people in your life and your family and your church lived a faithful life to model for you what true conversion is?

And what Jesus says here is your responsibility is to scatter the seed. That's verse 26. Then you sleep and you rise and something unseen has happened that you cannot produce.
But in verse 28, what happens is this slow process eventually comes to the place where it's evident that something has really happened.
Verse 29, but when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle because the harvest has come. The farmer worked.
The farmer was faithful. The farmer did what he was responsible to do. But God gave the increase.
[26:29] And the farmer enjoys the harvest. The farmer gets to go out in verse 29 and rejoice because the harvest has come. And what Jesus gives to us here is a very clear argument, a very clear progression of thought.

In verses 1 to 20, he says, share the gospel, but just know, as you do the work of a basin, just know that most are not going to believe. Don't give up.
Don't quit. He just says, from the very beginning, this is a hard task. And he also says that while it's a hard task, there are some who will believe.
And those who do believe have a responsibility and a follow-through. And we are to spread the light of the gospel. We are to steward what God gives to us, and we rejoice in knowing that God saves sinners by His grace.

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Now, is evangelism the work of man or of God? Well, in evangelism, we have a human responsibility to scatter the seed.
[27:39] But we acknowledge that the work of salvation can only be produced by God. And the example, the analogy Jesus gives us is crystal clear that a farmer cannot say, I trust God to do what He can do, therefore I won't scatter the seed.

That doesn't work that way. The faithful farmer must scatter the seed. His trust in the sovereignty of God never precludes him from scattering the seed.
But that farmer can scatter seed all he wants. He can't make everything grow.
Things are going to have to happen beyond His control in a realm He cannot see. So Jesus says in verses 1 to 20, you've got to be faithful in the work of evangelism no matter how hard it is.
And then He comes back and says, be faithful in your responsibility and you participate in the work of evangelism, but you have to rest in the mystery that there is a sovereign aspect of salvation that while you sleep the Holy Spirit is doing what only the Spirit of God can do.
[29:06] And yet when we look at what the Lord has done, we rejoice in verse 29, that grain is ripe and the harvest has come.

We're in the middle of a season of getting to see this take place. We've had a number of weeks in a row of baptism of new believers in our next service. We've got three more people being baptized today, one child, two adults.
We rejoice in this. We rejoice in a season where we're seeing a number of people brought to faith in Christ. We're baptizing people every single week of all ages. We rejoice in that.
And we have a responsibility in that. We're to preach the gospel. We're to proclaim the gospel. We're to do the work of evangelism. But we also understand we can't save anybody.
We preach. We share. We call for people to repent. We call on them to trust in the name of the Lord.
[30:10] But then we go to sleep. We don't twist arms. We don't beg. We don't manipulate. We scatter the seed.

And like the farmer in Jesus analogy, we go to sleep. But praise God, the Holy Spirit is at work. And in ways that we cannot see, and in ways that we cannot know, spiritual growth happens.
Which brings us to a fourth reality this morning. God spreads his kingdom all over the world. We spread the light of the gospel. That's where he started.
And then we steward the opportunities he gives us. God saves by his grace. And then it ends with God spreads his kingdom all over the world. We spread the light of the gospel.
God spreads his kingdom. Now, I want you with this fourth heading, I want you to make note of two words here. first, write down the word appearance.
[31:18] There's a way that the kingdom of God appears. Look at verse 30. And he said, with what can we compare the kingdom of God or what parable shall we use for?

Now, if you just stop for a minute, let's think of the words of Jesus. To what shall we compare the kingdom of God? If you don't know what comes next, you might think, well, maybe he's going to use a mountain.
Something big, majestic, and strong. To what should we compare the kingdom of God? It's like a mountain. Or, maybe he could use the sun.
Something bright, and strong, and powerful. To what should we compare the kingdom of God? It's like the sun. But look what he says.
With what can we compare the kingdom of God? Or, what parable shall we use for it? Verse 31, it is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when sown on the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds in the earth.
[32:33] This was the smallest seed his audience would have been familiar with. It's the smallest seed they would have worked with, that they knew anything about.

And it's kind of a strange analogy, isn't it? Not the sun, not the mountain, but a tiny mustard seed. Have you ever seen a mustard seed? I mean, it's hard to even see. I've got one in a little jar in my office. You can hardly even see that something's in there so small. And this is the analogy Jesus uses?
To describe the kingdom of God? Well, the smallness at the beginning does not mean it is insignificant. It's a picture of something that the world thinks is insignificant.

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even as the mustard seed begins to grow and as the mustard seed does what it does to expand, the world is not impressed with a mustard seed and what it becomes.
[33:51] you don't take vacations. Look at the beautiful mustard seed plants. It's insignificant when it's a seed and it's not that impressive or important when it's full grown.

And Jesus says this is like the kingdom of God. It appears to the world to be insignificant. It appears to the world to be small.
Acts 4.13 Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John and perceived they were uneducated common men they were astonished.
Why? Because Peter and John seemed so insignificant. Now Acts 4.13 says people recognize they had been with Jesus but in and of themselves the disciples were just ordinary men.
There's nothing flashy about the disciples and these are the men the Lord calls to himself. Jesus says if you want to compare the kingdom of God to something look at the mustard seed.
[35:03] It's small. The world thinks it's no big deal. The world thinks it's insignificant. That's how it appears to the world. But write down a second word and it's the word reality.

verse 32 yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and puts out large branches so the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.
Mustard plants in Palestine would grow to about 15 feet. Jesus is reminding people here that the kingdom of God from an earthly perspective may look like it's losing.
Now why would I say that? Because in Mark 4 1-20 three out of four kinds of people who heard the gospel were not converted. Only one of four that heard the gospel truly believed.
Only 25% of the hearts who heard the gospel truly believed. that doesn't seem very significant. If you make a 25% of your math test you don't come home and brag to your parents about the 25% you got right.
[36:25] They would say let's talk about the 75% you missed. Jesus says the world may look at the kingdom and think that it's losing.

The world may look at the kingdom of God and think it's irrelevant. The world may look at the kingdom of God and think it will soon be extinct.
And it's interesting because this kind of thinking sneaks into the church. so many times even churches or so called churches take a look at the preaching of the word take a look at the Bible and say this is just not enough anymore.
I mean preaching is antiquated the Bible is old its ideas are archaic it's just not going to survive and so even inside of so called churches you've got people who think that the Bible is just not significant enough.
We've got to do other things. We've got to add other things. We cannot have a church that's just about the reading and teaching and obedience of the scripture. We've got to do something to jazz it up a bit.
[37:50] the Lord says when you look at the mustard seed it appears small. When you look at the work of evangelism it's going to constantly seem like it's a losing battle.

Yet verse 32 when it is sown it grows up and it becomes large the kingdom of God advances.
It says with many such parables he spoke the word to them as they were able to hear it. Let's give you three very quick things as we finish this morning.
Number one, if you're a believer shine the light of the gospel and do not be discouraged by the results.
Shine the light of the gospel and do not be discouraged by the results. Number two, remember you are a part of something that cannot be defeated.
[39:08] This gives me so much hope in my personal Christian life. I'm a part of a work that cannot be defeated. Because I belong to Jesus and because I'm a part of his kingdom and I know that God will accomplish his purpose in the kingdom, I am a part of an enterprise that cannot lose.

It doesn't matter what the world says about me or thinks about me, it doesn't matter what somebody says about what I believe, in the end I cannot lose. Why would I be discouraged?
Why would lose? And that's true for everyone who belongs to Christ.
Don't be discouraged. You're a part of something that cannot be defeated. I'll just close by asking this question. Do you belong to this kingdom?
Do you belong to the kingdom of God? Do you know for sure that you're his? I remember being a seventh grader and being the second shortest person in my school, in middle school.

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[40:28] Not just second shortest guy, second shortest person, period. Walking the halls and looking up to everybody. I don't know when a person grows.

Did you ever wake up one morning and say, I'm taller today? Did you ever eat a meal and say, I think I just got taller? No. Do you ever take a nap and wake up and think, I'm tall?
No. You just go to bed. And you get up and live and you go to bed. And you get up and live and you go to bed.
Physical growth happens quite slowly. And usually you can't even discern it. And then all of a sudden you look at your child and they put on a pair of jeans and they've become shorts.
Did you just grow overnight? Well, no, they didn't just grow overnight. It happens very slowly and then sometimes you just notice it. Or you've got your teenager at your house and you see them every day and you don't even notice they're changing and then one day they come down the stairs to go to school and your boy looks like a man and your daughter looks like a woman.
[41:52] You say, what happened? When did you get so big? Well, it's just the result of faithful living, of sleeping and eating and then growth occurs.

It's the same way in your spiritual life. Just be faithful. You're not going to notice your spiritual growth every single day.
It's the same thing in your work of evangelism. You're not going to probably have everyone who just responds with faith. You're just going to scatter the seed and go to sleep. Scatter the seed and go to sleep.
Read your Bible, pray, live a godly life and go to sleep and then one day you're going to look out and say, look what God is doing. I see some fruit. I see the kingdom of God advancing.
And I get to be a part of something that cannot lose. My brothers and sisters, be faithful to what he's called us to do.
[43:04] Don't worry about how the kingdom appears to the world. Live in the reality that God will build his church.

Amen? Amen. Lord, thank you for your word today. May it give us instruction, correction, and encouragement. We ask it in Jesus' name.
Amen. On your way out, if you're a guest, if you would please remember. Amen.

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