

The Glories of the Mount

Luke 9: 28-62

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Table of Contents

Part 1 The Glories of the Mount.....	1
Part 2 The Sorrows of the Plain.....	4

Part 1 The Glories of the Mount

Following the Lord in His perfect path we are led, in Luke 9, into two scenes of surpassing interest. One scene unfolds itself on the Mount of Transfiguration; the other is enacted in the Plains of Galilee. On the Mount we find ourselves in company with Christ in the midst of heavenly things, learning the secrets of the Father's heart. In the Plain we have Christ in company with us amid the sorrows of earth, there to learn the secrets of our hearts in the presence of the grace of His heart.

For the good and prosperity of our souls we do well to linger awhile in both these scenes. The Mount, however, must precede the Plain. Our hearts must be assured of our part in the glories of the Mount before we can face the sorrows of the Plain.

Let us then for awhile turn aside from man, and his small world, and, as it were, ascend the Mount, seeking in spirit to breathe its holy atmosphere and delight our souls in its varied glories.

We are not left to our own spiritual discernment to interpret the scene on the Mount, for we have the inspired account of one who was present. Referring to the time when he and others were with Christ on "the holy mount," Peter can say "we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His Majesty. For He received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to Him from the excellent glory, This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased" (2 Peter 1: 16-18). Thus Peter plainly tells us that the holy Mount gives us a foretaste of the glories and the joys that we shall share at the coming, or "presence" of the Lord. For long He has been absent, but when at last He is present and we in His presence, we shall see His majesty. We who have seen the shame and dishonour heaped upon Him by man, shall see with great delight the "honour and glory" that He will receive from the Father. In company with Christ we shall be ushered into the Father's presence and hear the Father's voice telling us of His delight in His beloved Son.

The holy Mount gives us a foretaste of these coming glories. Here, indeed, we partake of the fatness of God's house, and drink of the river of His pleasures.

Entering upon this scene of blessedness we are at once encountered with a holy mystery. For all this eternal weight of glory is introduced with *a praying Man*. "It came to pass . . . He took Peter and John and James, and went up into a mountain to pray. And *as He prayed*, the fashion of His countenance was altered." The sorrows of earth can be traced back to the disobedience and independence of one man. The glories of the world to come commence with the obedience and dependence of one Man. The coming glories of heaven centre round a praying Man on earth.

Then, as with great delight we gaze upon the Lord in prayer, we are permitted to see the praying Man changed into the glorified Man. "His countenance was altered, and His raiment was white and glistening." When man became independent of God, he ceased to glorify God and became the dishonoured man (Romans 1: 21-32): here is One who became the dependent Man, glorified God, and He Himself is glorified. On earth we see the glory of man which, Peter reminds us, is as the flower of the field, for it "falleth away"; but on the Mount we get with Peter a passing vision of a glory that will never pass away. We see "His majesty" and His glory.

But the Mount has further blessed disclosures, for it tells us not only that we shall see His glory, but *we shall share His glory*. We shall not only be delighted beholders, but privileged partakers. And so we read "there talked *with Him* two men. " To be spectators of a scene of unparalleled glory would not satisfy the heart's deep longings. Again to have part in a glory from which Christ was absent, would not be enough. Such, however, the grace that leads to glory, that we shall *behold* the glory, and *share* the glory, and share it *with Him*.

Furthermore the Mount tells us another blessed fact, that we shall not only be with Him but shall also be *like Him*; and so we read not only that Moses and Elias appeared, but they "appeared *in glory*." We shall not only see the glory and share the glory, but we shall be suited to the glory. Moses has done with his wilderness staff; Elias has laid aside his prophet's mantle. The days of their humiliation have for ever passed away and they appear in glory. Not only are they with Christ, but they are like Christ, and they are suited to be with Christ, because they are like Christ. On earth it does not yet appear what we shall be, but on the Mount we get a glimpse of what we shall be when He appears. We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is (1 John 3: 2)

Nor is this all, for the Mount discloses another secret. Not only shall we share the glory and be suited to the glory, but we shall be *at home in the glory*. For we read of Moses and Elias that they "talked with Him." This speaks of the holy, happy intercourse of saints in glory. Had it been written merely that He talked with them, we might judge that they would have been delighted but silent listeners. If, however, they can talk with Him, all distance and reserve are gone. The disciples had indeed held sweet intercourse with Christ on earth, howbeit, at times with a measure of restraint, but in glory there will be holy, happy intercourse with the Lord without a trace of reserve.

Further, we not only see that in glory there will be free and happy communion, but we learn the great theme of heaven's intercourse. They "spake of His decease which He should accomplish." Immediately before, as directly after the scene on the Mount, the Lord refers to His death (vv. 22, 24), but we read "they understood not" (v. 45). In the Plain they are dull of hearing; on the Mount there is divine intelligence in the mind of heaven and the heart of Jesus. There Moses and Elias commune with Christ about that which fills His heart. They lose sight of the enmity of men; they no longer think of the death of Christ as brought about by wicked hands, but rather of "His decease which *He should accomplish*." Man's part in that great transaction calls aloud for judgment upon the world. What He did sends the glad tidings to earth's remotest bounds. Moreover they see that His death would be accomplished "*at Jerusalem*." How passing strange to a Jew. In the very place from whence the Messiah is going to reign, and where He will receive a throne and a crown, that there He should accomplish His death, and receive a cross and a grave. But on the Mount such wonders are spoken of without astonishment. There all is clear. The glory of the kingdom must be established in righteousness. To meet the righteous claims of God He must accomplish His decease. The sufferings must come before the glory. Righteousness must be met in the death of Christ at Jerusalem, if the grace of God is to flow out world wide "beginning at Jerusalem" (Luke 24: 47).

Moses had given the law, but none knew better than Moses how utterly the nation had failed under the law. Elias had been raised up to recall backsliding Israel to Jehovah, only to prove their hopeless condition. Christ Himself had come, full of grace and truth, only to be utterly rejected. Moses, Elias, and above all Christ Himself, are the witnesses of the nation's guilt and the deep necessity for the sufferings of Christ if they are to reach the glories of the Kingdom. No longer does Moses call the people "rebels"; no longer does Elias charge the children of Israel with having forsaken the covenant, thrown down the altars, and slain the prophets. They look beyond the nation and the wickedness of men; they see Christ, the death that He shall accomplish, and the glories that are on beyond. They indeed looked on to the glory through the death of Christ; we shall look back from the glory to the decease which He accomplished. It was their theme on the Mount, it will be our song in the glory of which the Mount was but a blessed earnest.

Finally, in this great scene we are carried into a glory that exceeds the glory of the Kingdom, for we are led into the Father's house. "There came a cloud and overshadowed them." They were surrounded and covered by the cloud. These Jewish disciples would well understand the significance of the cloud telling them of the Shekinah glory that of old filled the dwelling place of God and spoke of the presence of God. In the days of their wilderness journey the cloud was over Israel, but they never entered the cloud. Here on the Mount, on the ground of the death of Christ that He was about to accomplish, and in company with a glorified Christ, these disciples enter into the Father's house. And in the Father's house they hear the Father's voice, and the Father's voice declares the Father's heart. They hear the Father saying, "This is My beloved Son, hear Him." As one has said, "the Father does not say, This is the Son whom you ought to adore and admire, but He tells us His own thoughts about Him." "This is My beloved Son." It is not simply that we are reminded that Christ is our Beloved, as the bride in the Song of Songs can say, "My Beloved is mine, and I am His," but we hear the Father saying, "This is My Beloved." Beloved indeed because of His own intrinsic excellence, but "Beloved" also because of the decease He was about to accomplish. "Therefore doth My Father love Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again." We have just learned that the heart of the Son is occupied with the obedience of love to the Father in going into death, and now we learn that the Father's heart is delighting in the Son. Here, then, it is our privilege to have fellowship with divine Persons; to have fellowship with the Son in His thoughts of perfect obedience to the Father's will, and have fellowship with the Father in His delight in the Son.

What a portion and prospect is thus opened to the believer by the death of Christ which He should accomplish at Jerusalem, and the glory of Christ that would follow, a prospect that gives us to enter the Father's house, to hear the Father's voice, and discloses to us the Father's heart!

Again we say what a scene is this which brings us into touch with things which "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him!" Truly a foretaste of the universe of bliss where man will be brought into dependence upon God, in a scene of glory, with Christ and like Christ. There to be at home with Christ, speak of all that is in His heart, and learn the secrets of the Father's heart.

Small, indeed, may be the measure in which we taste the blessedness of such a scene. Like the disciples the heaviness of earth clings to us and the infirmities of the body hamper us, so that we see but little into the heart of these heavenly mysteries. Yet for our comfort we read, "When they were awake they saw His glory." Nor will it be otherwise with ourselves, for, says the apostle, "Awake thou that sleepest . . . and Christ shall shine upon thee." And in His light we shall see light; we shall see the coming glories, we shall look beyond the shadows on the valley and see the sunlight on the hills, but above all we shall see "the King in His beauty," the One who is "the chiefest among ten thousand," and

"altogether lovely."

Part 2 The Sorrows of the Plain

The Mount, with its foretaste of coming glories, is a happy place for the soul to visit; nevertheless the Plain, with its sorrows, is our daily lot as we journey through this world. But though we have to leave the Mount and face the Plain, we are not called to leave the company of Jesus; for we read, "When the voice was past Jesus was found alone." The vision of glory fades, the cloud is lifted, the voice is silent, but Jesus remains, and remains alone with His disciples.

Jesus had taken the disciples with Him into the Mount; now the disciples will have Jesus with them in the Plain. They face the Plain with the secret of the Mount in their hearts: a secret that in those days they will keep close, for they tell no man of the things which they had seen. The glories they had looked upon, the place they had entered, and the voice they had heard, are beyond the capacity and desires of the natural mind. However, the day will come when Peter will no longer keep these things close, but will tell those who have received like precious faith, of the Majesty of the Lord, of the excellent glory, and of the Father's voice. Peter's disclosure will also speak of the abiding impression made upon the souls of the disciples by their visit to the Mount. Henceforth the lowly Jesus that they follow is One whom they have seen in power and glory, and though their pilgrim path may at times be dark, it is lit up with the light of the glory to which it leads. For ourselves, too, what a difference it makes if we have seen the King in His beauty, and take our journey through the sorrows of the Plain in the light of the Christ of the Mount.

Thus the disciples and ourselves are prepared to face the Plain and its sorrows. Coming down from the hill, they meet "much people," an only child under the power of the devil, and faithless disciples (vv. 37-41). They are face to face with a needy *world*, the power of the *devil*, and the unbelief of the *flesh*.

These sorrows of the Plain find their expression in the pitiful case of the man who beseeches the Lord to look upon his only son. The father's heart racked with distress, his son's body torn by the devil, the crowd unconcerned, and the disciples of the Lord helpless! What a picture is this of the world in which we are! A needy but callous world around us, the devil against us, and the flesh within us. Though like the disciples we have the Lord in all His grace with us, and the Lord with His coming glory before us. It is as if He said, "I have shown you on the Mount the glory to which I will bring you; I will now show you in the Plain the grace that can keep you every step of the journey on the way to the glory."

If, however, we are to learn the exceeding grace of His heart, we must discover our weakness to lean on His strength, our need to draw upon His grace. Hence it is that the Lord discovers to the disciples, and to ourselves, the true character of the flesh (vv. 41-45); the different forms of selfishness that it assumes (vv. 46-56); and lastly, the different ways in which we may be hindered by nature (vv. 57-62).

First we have the exposure of the flesh in its *unbelief* (vv. 40-41). In the presence of the failure of the disciples to cast out the demon, the Lord has to say, "O unbelieving and perverted generation, how long shall I be with you and suffer you?" (v. 41, N. Tr.). Desperate need was there in the case of the child possessed with the demon; grace was there to meet the need in the Person of Jesus; the professed disciples of the Lord were there, but, alas, the world looks to them in vain. They are helpless by reason of the unbelief of the flesh that renders them incapable of using the power of the Lord at their disposal,

and the perversity of the flesh that could not profit by all the marvellous manifestations of His power and grace.

In one brief sentence the Lord indicates the serious result of the unbelief of His professed disciples. He asks, "How long shall I be with you and suffer you?" Words implying that the period of the Lord's presence in grace was drawing to its close; and that the end would be brought about, not by the evil of the world nor the terrible power of Satan, but because those who professed His Name were unable to use the grace and power that Christ had brought into the world. The Lord does not say, "O needy world, how long shall I be with you?" for it was the need of the world that brought Him into it, but He asks of unbelieving disciples, "How long shall I be with you and suffer you?" Solemn consideration for ourselves, for it is not otherwise in this the day of grace. It is the failure of that which professes the Name of Christ upon the earth that will bring the dispensation to a close; as we read, "Toward thee [professing Christendom] goodness, if thou continue in His goodness; otherwise *thou also shall be cut off*" (Romans 11: 22). The dispensation was opened by the power and goodness of God, and will be closed by the incapacity of those who have professed the Name of Christ to use His power and grace.

However, for our comfort, be it noted that the failure of those who profess the Name of Christ only serves to bring to light the unfailing resources of Christ for those who have faith in Himself. Very blessedly this comes to light in this fine scene. Having spoken of our faithlessness and perversity, the Lord immediately adds, "Bring thy son hither." The first portion of the verse exposes our hearts, the latter part reveals His heart. It is as if He said, "However much you fail, you will find in Me an unfailing resource, so that whatever you find in your hearts, and whatever your needs, come to Me, bring them all to Me." The dispensation was drawing to a close, yet as long as the Lord was present, His grace and power were available for all that brought their needs to Him. So today, again, the dispensation fast hastens to its close, the shadows lengthen and the darkness deepens, but as one has truly said, "As long as Christ's grace is at work, if there is only one saint on the earth and everything else failed around, he would find the power of Christ ready to be exercised on his behalf." How comforting then is the truth that underlies these words of the Lord, "Bring thy son hither." May it be our happy portion to profit by them in bringing our needs, our sorrows, our difficulties, and our exercises to Christ. And yet the fact of bringing our exercise to Christ may at times make the difficulties appear greater. As in the case before us, when in answer to the Lord's word they bring the child, we read, "the devil threw him down and tare him." Nothing so enrages the devil as a saint turning to the Lord in prayer. It may become the occasion of a fresh and violent outburst of the devil's opposition which accentuates the very trouble we desire to have removed, but in the end it only magnifies the grace and power that acts for our relief.

But, alas, the display of the grace and power of the Lord becomes a fresh occasion for the exposure of the unbelief of the human heart, for we read, "they were all amazed at the mighty power of God," and again, "they wondered every one at all things which Jesus did." How humbling was this amazement and wonder. How far man must have departed from God if he shows no amazement at the power of the devil, but is amazed when God puts forth His power. Seeing that God was present in the Person of Jesus, the amazing thing would be if He did not act in power. We might well be amazed at the power of the devil and the powerlessness of the disciples, but only unbelief could wonder at the mighty power of God.

Thus the Lord has exposed to us the unbelief of the flesh. Then, having acted in power in casting out the demon, the Lord takes occasion to warn us of another form of flesh — *the pride of the flesh* — which would seek to take occasion by the display of power to exalt itself (vv. 43, 44). This display of

power might lead to the thought that Christ is in honour in this world, forgetting that He is rejected of men. The Lord checks this thought by saying to the disciples, "Let these sayings sink down into your ears; for the Son of Man shall be delivered into the hands of men." The disciples were looking for a kingdom in power, the Lord had before Him crucifixion in weakness. Theirs was the mind to exalt themselves in Kingdom glory and power. His was the lowly mind to humble Himself even to death. They were looking for the display of power before men; He for rejection by men. The Kingdom in power will come, as the scene on the Mount surely tells us, but it is reached through the rejection by men and the suffering of the cross.

Moreover, behind the pride of the flesh there is *the ignorance of the flesh*; as we read, "they understood not" (v. 45). How little are the words of the Lord even yet understood by many devoted Christians. How much of the effort put forth by Christians is to make some appeal to man by the display of outward power — the power of imposing buildings, the power of music, the power of eloquence, the power of scholarship. How little are we prepared to accept the cross and the rejection of Christ, and take the outside place of reproach and weakness, in company with the poor, and weak, and despised of this world.

Further, behind the ignorance of the flesh there is *the distrust of the flesh*. Not only were the disciples ignorant, but we read, "they feared to ask Him." They lacked the confidence in Christ that would have led them to express their difficulties to Christ. Alas, we are often like Peter, in the Upper Room, not near enough to the Lord to tell Him all our difficulties. If, like John, we were resting in His love, how easy it would be to take to Him all our hard questions.

Thus in this short passage we have the flesh exposed in its unbelief, pride, ignorance, and distrust. The disciples were faithless as to the power and grace of Christ, ignorant of the mind of Christ, and lacking confidence in the heart of Christ. Nevertheless, for our comfort, we see that if Christ uses the sorrows of the Plain to expose our hearts it is only that He may reveal the grace of His heart. If He exposes our evil it is in the presence of a grace that meets it all.

How is it that in this day, with its great privileges, we are still so often marked by unbelief, pride, ignorance, and lack of confidence in the Lord? Is it not that we have *self* before us as an object rather than Christ. This is strikingly brought before us in the next portion of the chapter (vv. 46-56). In these verses the Holy Spirit brings before us different forms in which selfishness may express itself.

The first form is *personal selfishness* (vv. 46-48). The disciples reasoned amongst themselves which of them should be the greatest. They were measuring greatness after the manner of men; but how different is the greatness of man to the greatness of God. The greatness of man is expressed by seeking to exalt self, at the expense of others, to the highest place, in company with the greatest persons. The greatness of God is expressed by a Man who comes into the lowest place and associates with the insignificant and despised. This is the path to true greatness and was trodden in perfection by Christ, and hence God hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a Name which is above every Name (Phil. 2: 5-9).

The second form of selfishness is *party selfishness* (vv. 49, 50). We read that John answered and said, "Master, we saw one casting out devils in Thy Name; and we forbad him, because he followeth not *with us*." Here John is apparently not thinking of himself personally, but of the company, the "us." This is a more subtle form of selfishness than the last, because it has the appearance of ignoring self for the good of the company you are with. In reality it generally means the desire to exalt the company in order to make something of self. This is indeed party-selfishness. John and those with him forbad the man to cast out demons, not because it was a wrong thing to do, but because he did not follow with

them. What the man was doing might indeed have been for the glory of Christ and the blessing of man, but it was not done in connection with "us," and therefore added nothing to "us," and so in the eyes of John must be condemned. But in so thinking and speaking, John had before him the disciples and their importance, rather than Christ and His honour. In His reply the Lord in tender grace uses John's word, but rebukes John's thought. "Forbid him not; for he that is not against *us* is for *us*." The Lord does not say the man is "with us" but "for us." The disciples indeed were both "with Christ" and "for Christ." The man was "for" Christ, and in this sense was "for" the disciples, for they, too, were "for" Christ. Blessed to be, like the disciples in any true sense with Christ in the place of reproach, but let such beware that they cast no slight upon those who are "for" Christ, even if by reason of their associations they cannot walk *with* them.

The last form of selfishness is *the exaltation of self under the cloak of zeal for the Lord* (vv. 51-56). We have had selfishness seen in zeal for self; then selfishness hiding itself under zeal for party; now we have selfishness cloaking itself under zeal for the Lord. Of all forms of selfishness this is the most subtle and difficult to detect, for who can complain of zeal for the Lord, or say that is wrong? and yet under zeal for the Lord there may lurk zeal for self. It was so in this case. The earthly path of the Lord was drawing to its close. He was about to be received up, and His face was set to go to Jerusalem. His path lay through the Samaritan villages, and they would not receive Him. Their fathers had rejected Elijah of old, the children now reject Elijah's Lord and Master. The disciples, resenting the insult put upon their Master, would fain invoke the judgment of heaven upon these Christ-rejectors, even as Elijah had called down the fire from heaven upon his enemies. Zeal for Christ would desire the judgment of His enemies, righteousness might seem to demand it, and a Scripture precedent would support such a course; nevertheless the Lord rebukes His disciples, saying, "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of." Underneath their zeal the Lord detects and exposes a spirit that is entirely alien to Himself. The Lord was exercising power in grace to meet man's need. The disciples would exercise power in judgment to gratify their own self-importance. He would show grace for the blessing of others. They would exercise judgment for the exaltation of themselves.

The rejection of their Lord and Master, with all His grace and power, by these corrupt Samaritans, raised the anger and resentment of the disciples, because they had some self-importance to maintain, and this self-importance had been slighted by the insult shown to their Master. The disciples would take advantage of the wickedness of these people to exercise a judgment they deserved, but they would do so in the spirit of retaliation. Self was the secret of their proposal, but hidden under the cloak of zeal for the Lord.

How different the spirit of the Lord, the One whose grace had been so slighted. Though Lord of all He was here with a tender heart and a lowly mind, having no self-importance to maintain. Hence the rejection that calls forth the disciples' indignation, only reveals His patient and silent submission, even as a little later, His rejection by Jerusalem calls forth His tears. James and John would consume the rejectors of their Master with fire, as later Peter would fight against them with a sword. But Christ, without resentment and without retaliation, will pass on to another village.

There is yet another great hindrance to our service and testimony for the Lord. Not only the flesh, in its different forms of selfishness, but *nature* with its claims may be a very real hindrance. This comes before us in the closing verses of the chapter (vv. 57-62).

First we learn that *the energy of nature* cannot take the path of true discipleship. One comes to the Lord saying, "I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest." This may have been the outcome of a generous impulse that drew the man to the Lord. At the same time it betrays the levity of nature that

apprehended not who the Lord was, where He was going, or the path He was treading. He was indeed the rejected Man; He was "in the way" to be received up into a world of glory, yet, on the way, in this present world, He had no home and only a cross and a grave before Him. It would be wiser to go to the foxes for a hole, and the birds for a nest, than to come to the Son of Man for a home on earth. The energy of nature, however genuine, was not prepared for such a path. Nature can do much but it cannot forgo itself, its ease, its comforts, to follow a rejected Lord. And thus the path having been put before this volunteer we hear no more of him.

Further, we learn that *the relationships of nature* may be a real hindrance in the service of the Lord (vv. 59-60). In this case the man is called to follow the Lord by the Lord Himself. The first man, acting in the lightness of nature, sees no difficulties: this man being called by the Lord is at once conscious of difficulties. As Moses in an earlier day, acting in the energy of nature, thought to find it a simple matter to put things right among the people of God; but when called of God he can see nothing but difficulties. So with this man in the gospel day; his difficulty appeared to be great — an aged father drawing nigh to the grave, and dependent upon the son. Faced with this difficulty the man says, as it were, "I am ready to answer to the call, but suffer me first to wait until my father has died and I have carried out my last duties in connection with this natural claim." This, indeed, sounds reasonable, for the father had the first claim in nature. Christ, however, must have the first claim in the new life; and it was a question of life and death. As one has said, the Lord was putting in His claim for the life He had given, a life that demanded that Christ and His claims should be first. The man puts the claims of the dead first, as he says, "Let me first bury my father." The Lord is not denying or setting aside the claims of nature, but He is asserting His own paramount claims. The man did not see that if the Lord calls, His claims must be first, and that the One who calls can at the same time care for the father that is left behind.

Finally, we learn that *natural affection* may become a real hindrance in the service of the Lord (vv. 61-62). This man also volunteers to follow the Lord, but he first desires to go and bid them farewell at home. This, however natural, indicates to the Lord's all-searching gaze, that his heart lingered in the home. He would fain put his hand to the plough — engage in service — but his heart was "looking back" to the home, and we go the way that we look. How impossible for the labourer to plough his furrow while walking one way and looking another. The service of the Lord demands an undivided heart.

Thus we are warned that nature may become a real hindrance in the service of the Lord. It is not that the Lord sets aside the mercy of a dwelling place on earth, the claims and duties connected with natural relationships, or the affections that belong to these relationships, but He puts His claims first, and looks for a devotedness that surrenders all to Him. Thus only will the disciples be "fit for the Kingdom of God." This last word of the Lord brings us back to the Mount where the disciples had seen the Kingdom of God in its glory (v. 27). It is only in the light of the glory of Christ in the Kingdom of God, and in the power of the grace of Christ in the Plain, that we shall be able to refuse the flesh in its varied forms, the selfishness of our hearts, and the claims of nature.

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