

"Jesus - Logician & Apologist"

Dallas Willard

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["Jesus - Logician & Apologist" \(audio\) \[1:09:44\]](#)

[Dallas starts after an intro from [BigThinking.org](#)]

Introduction [0:00:43]

The way that Jesus works with people ties in with our work in Apologetics.

The heart of Apologetics** - We often think of it as a public ministry. That's perfectly alright. On the other hand, when you come to the nature of the operation, you see that it is also primarily an intensely personal kind of ministry.



[** Willard — ["Spiritual Formation - Apologetics & Knowledge"](#)]



[** Willard — ["Apologetics"](#) Grace Church, So CA, 1990]

[See [The Allure of Gentleness Study Guide & 7 Session Course](#)]

I Peter 3:8-15 - The Charter of Apologetics

8 "Finally, be ye all likeminded, compassionate, loving as brethren, tenderhearted, humble minded: 9 not rendering evil for evil, or reviling for reviling; but contrariwise blessing; for hereunto were ye called, that ye should inherit a blessing.10 For He that would love life, And see good days, Let him refrain his tongue from evil, And his lips that they speak no guile 11 And let him turn away from evil, and do good; Let him seek peace, and pursue it. 12 For the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, And his ears unto their supplication: But the face of the Lord is upon them that do evil. 13 And who is he that will harm you, if ye be zealous of that which is good? 14 But even if ye should suffer for righteousness' sake, blessed are ye: and fear not their fear, neither be troubled; 15 but sanctify in your hearts Christ as Lord: being ready always to give answer to every man that asks you a reason concerning the hope that is in you, yet with meekness and fear*..." (ASV) (NASB - * "gentleness and reverence")

The context is a context of suffering. Peter has a lot to say about suffering.

This particular passage is a beautiful teaching.

v. 9 - *"Not giving evil for evil...give a blessing instead."*

Blessing is a ground you stand in. Same thing can be said for forgiveness. That's why Jesus so often brings up forgiveness in praying and answers to prayer.

v. 13 - *"Who to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good?"*

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Actually, there are a lot of people who can do that. Peter is taking a deeper theme - who can really get at you if you are zealous for what is good? As you do that you are standing in a place it is true that you are perfectly safe because God is standing with you, no matter what happens to you.

v. 14 - *"Even if you suffer, you are blessed."*

Suffering for the sake of righteousness is a blessing. That's one of the Beatitudes. Peter did not think this up on his own.

In that blessing, you do not fear their intimidation. We are not troubled. You have put Christ in a special place in your heart. Sanctify Christ as Lord. He is in charge of whatever the situation may be.

v. 15 - Be ready to explain to others. *"Make a defense."* (ASV) As our translations often do, they reflect a mentality.

"Be ready to give a reason for the hope that is in you." (Older version)

A.B Bruce - *Christianity Defensively Stated*

That makes the hair rise on the back of my neck because I am not a great one for being defensive. I think the older version, *"be ready to give a reason."* Sometimes the reason acts as a defense. The purpose here is to help people understand something. They have a problem on their hands. Maybe they have been inflicting suffering on this person and this person is standing there blessing them...not through gritted teeth but generously loving them. As they look at that they say,

"This is a hopeful person. Where did that hope come from?"

"Give an account for the hope that is in you with gentleness and reverence." (v. 15)

I think that characterizes apologetics in the manner of Jesus. I think Peter picked this up from watching our Lord. One of the things we might miss if we aren't careful is watching how often Jesus gives an answer to a question to help people out who are really in a mental bind.

II Corinthians 10 - A Teaching About Grace

[7:35]

"Now I, Paul, myself urge you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ—I who am meek when face to face with you, but bold toward you when absent! 2 I ask that when I am present I need not be bold with the confidence with which I propose to be courageous against some, who regard us as if we walked according to the flesh. 3 For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, 4 for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. 5 We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, 6 and we are ready to punish all disobedience, whenever your obedience is complete." (NASB)

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Grace - (def.) *"God acting in our lives to accomplish what we can not accomplish on our own."*

Paul is involved in a church battle. Paul did not try to be overwhelming. The word went out that he is a weak speaker. He is giving the rap on Paul as a speaker - *he really is not impressive but his letters are powerful*. Paul understands how to carry out these matters of personal encounter. He tried to avoid of being in a position of crushing people.

v. 3 - *"Though we walk in the flesh [we live in the natural world with natural abilities], we do not war in terms of the flesh. The weapons of the warfare are not of the flesh."*

Remember, Grace is... (def.)

"God acting in our lives to accomplish what we can not on our own."

The effects of what Paul does are beyond him. The weapons he is using in his battle are divinely powerful for the destruction of strongholds or fortresses. He knows that those strongholds & fortresses ideas are ideas, perceptions, assumptions and these are the framework that imprisons the minds that he is dealing with. He does not count on his ability to accomplish what he needs to achieve. There is a paradox in what we think about. **We do our best but never trust our best.** Our faith is not in our best but God acting with us. That spirit of entering into the work of apologetics is absolutely crucial. When we step into the realm of apologetics, we are not exercising our cleverness and trying to engineer our way. We are acting in dependence upon God that He will slip into the minds of the people we are talking to. Suddenly they will see things differently. If they are locked into an emotional complex, they will always have a set of ideas. They will always come out in terms of questions that have assumptions. What Paul is used to is watching those assumptions dissolve, sometimes right before his eyes, sometimes later and to know it is the power of God that does that. Those are essential things when we think about the work of the apologist.

Truth and Logic

[12:55]

Our perception of that will help when we understand that we are working with truth and with logic. We are working as it exists in our context and in the minds of the person. Sometimes the logic is bad. Sometimes we need to help the person but rarely forcing them to come down in a certain place. I think the work of the Apologist is best when they think the answer is coming from them. I don't think that is a formal rule. We do our best and we trust God to work in the mind of the person we are working with.

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Apologetics

[14:00]

We are starting out assuming Apologetics is a "helping ministry". We are going to help people. That is the situation Peter and Paul are describing. We have come to help people offload assumptions and false ideas that have them in prison. It is very hard to do justice to the extent that our lives run on a set of ideas. Ideas are general, often vague representations of how things are and how they must be. They are quiet elusive. They are not the same things as beliefs. Ideas are more like ways of interpreting things and arriving at beliefs.

* Evolution in the University context

[15:00]

Evolution is not so much as a belief but an idea. If you try to approach it as a belief, you will rarely get anywhere. If you understand it is less a belief than a general way of interpreting things. An idea is wide spread. You can not get at those by trying to refute them. You have to understand their function and you can get people to think about them. God can work in the context of that mind enabling people to think, *"Maybe this way of interpreting things is not as adequate as I thought."* You've gained a big step for the person. Now they are going to start working. They will wake up in the middle of the night and start wondering. What we are aiming at is to get people to start wondering about things.

Read Augustine, Luther, CS Lewis - what you'll find is that it was a little question that began to undermine their ways of interpreting things and eventually lead to a dam break or avalanche and suddenly the whole scene changed.

* CS Lewis conversion - When got in the side car he was an atheist and when he got out he was a theist. You may be inclined to attribute that to the driving of brother. That was the dam break. Suddenly there was a reorientation.

Once we understand the position of ideas, we are in a better position to work with God in resolving difficulties.

The Ministry of Jesus

[17:45]

He tries to help people. In each of these cases there is a question and it comes out of an ideational setting.

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*** Matthew 11:1-6 - John the Baptist**

"Are you really the one or should we look for another?"

John had announced the Messiah. Jesus had not done that in the way John was thinking about. John is in prison and soon be parted from his his head. He's is saying, "How could this be?" He had a picture of deliverance the Messiah was going to bring.

- In Acts 1 they are still asking the wrong question,

"Jesus, are you going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"

Jesus answers John's question in a peculiar way. He is answering, "Yes, the Kingdom is here." He sends John's people back to tell him about a manifestation of a greater Kingdom to help them understand the issue is not what he thought it was. He responds to the question. He gives a reason that gives a different answer to that question and helps the person involved shift their sense of what was going on.

I think the work of the apologetic is for people generally, not just for unbelievers. Many people who are genuinely committed to Christ have serious questions that are blocking their progress in faith. One of the things we want to be sure is to listen to those questions. If we were to listen to those of who are already professed believers and answer them convincingly, we will do a great deal more. We will enable faith to blossom in the church.

When we stand to address our congregations, we are often facing a wall of unbelief. We profess many things we don't believe. They are not hypocrites. They are doing the best they can with what they have.

* Trinity - They profess faith in the Trinity but they don't make any sense of it. As a result, it is not a portion of a hearty faith. We need to understand that the ministry of Apologetics is not just for those who don't believe but for those who already believe as well

*** Mark 2 - Jesus and the Lame Man**

[22:30]

Jesus has really set some questions buzzing in the heads of the people who were there. Jesus had watchers all the time.

"Your sins are forgiven you."

This put the watchers to thinking, "Who is this man?" Profound question and great text for preaching. "Let me tell you about that!" You answer that question.

Jesus gives them an answer in terms fo what is easier to do - *"Your sins are forgiven"* or *"Pick up your mat and walk?"*

It is harder to say, *"Your sins are forgiven."* You have to be God to do that.

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In their minds, *"Take up your bed and walk"* is harder. If it is going to happen in the public. You can say, *"Your sins are forgiven"* but no one will know if it happened.

It gave them something to work on that they could think about it. Some when one way and said, "This man casts out demons on the power of the devil" so it did not convince everyone. It allows them to make progress if that they wish to.

We can help some people and can't others. We have to accept that. We don't do this work in our strength. We have to leave the outcome up to God.

*** Luke 7:36-50 - Simon the Pharisee**

Jesus is supposed to be a prophet. Here is a woman who was disgraceful. She is washing his feet with tears, worshipping Him. Simon is saying, "If this man were a prophet, that would not be happening because He would know who this woman was."

Jesus answer and tells them a story. Work through how did Jesus respond to Simon the Pharisee? Simon had a legitimate question for his framework but the problem was his framework was all wrong.

The work of Apologetics mostly goes after the frameworks, the general ideas. If we can succeed in loosening up the framework, there may be more work to do but normally the process of thought will answer the question but we have to be able to loosen the framework. That is really the great task and this is how this and that is how Jesus works.

Above all, Apologetics is intensely personal situation. To me that means it is not the same as Evangelism & Soul Winning. [28:00]

Evangelism - Proclamation of the Gospel and others related things.

Jesus' Ministry - Proclamation, Manifestation & Teaching (Matt. 4 & 80)

When he sent out his shock troops, they proclaimed and manifested but they did not teach. Teaching is harder. You can manifest the Kingdom in your life if you have the faith to step out and do it.

* John Wimber - "Doing the stuff"

Teaching requires genuine understanding. Jesus didn't tell them to teach, He told them to manifest. Proclamation is like putting up posters. "The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." You announce it. You proclaim it.

Soul Winning - Helping people come to a decision. [30:25]

An important work and we need people who know how to do that. They are people capable of watching and speaking with others but not driving

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them into a hole but helping them through the process and coming to an open confession of coming to faith in Jesus Christ.

Apologetics is neither one of those [Evangelism or Soul Winning]. Very often they run together. One should be alert to all of the differences. If you do evangelism apologetically, that will mess up the works. You will not proclaim because you'll be thinking about questions and trying to answer questions. Many people confuse evangelism with "Soul Winning" and people won't do Evangelism because they think it is "Soul Winning" and they don't know how to do that.

We need to think carefully about those three things and understand the situational nature of apologetics and work with that.

When Jesus sent His people out, He did send them out with some things on how you would do the work. He gives them really good advice.

"Be as wise as serpents and gentle as doves."

We need to pay attention to that in apologetic work. What is the wisdom of the serpent? Rarely see a serpent chasing down its prey. The wisdom is timeliness. It is watching for the right time. To do that you have to be attentive, to have great faith in God so you won't be trying to make things happen. Primarily what you do is to watch to identify the question that is in the mind of the individual, whether Christian or not. Those questions are what you have to respond to in the work of the Apologist.

"Innocence of the dove."

[33:35]

We don't use any sort of manipulating techniques. We are perfectly straightforward. We never try to mislead.

* USC - Often Christian groups will put out appeals that do not let the incoming students know that this is a Christian approach. They have the idea that they can get the hook in and then later on reveal that they are interested in evangelism, soul winning and apologetics.

I have tried to discourage that. I don't think there is room for anything but what is most clear, straightforward approach. I think that is what Jesus is saying. Beyond that to each concretely from our own lives. What we know in experience as well as systematic inquiry and the Bible. Always related back to our experience. When we do that, we get the proper situational context to help people with their questions.

* For example, talking about talking about how those questions have affected us is one of the keys to helping people with their own questions. By

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going inside of us, people are able to go into their own insides and not be looking outward trying to fend off someone who is trying to submerge them in something they are not sure they want to have.

The Situational Nature of Apologetics

[36:00]

Dealing with questions that are really there in the minds of the person we are talking with and trying to get back of that to get the ideational structure that gives rise to the questions. For example, how Jesus did that with John the Baptist. John misunderstood what the Kingdom was. It follows from the situational character of Apologetics...if I'm right. I may be wrong.

We listen carefully. Apologetics is a helping ministry. We are trying to help people. It is a loving ministry. Because it is a loving ministry, it is a listening ministry. You really do listen. This is one of the places where the gift of the Spirit exist. One of the gifts is knowledge. *"Lord, give me guidance on what is really here."* The presenting problem is rarely the real problem The real problem has to be identified by the Spirit. We listen carefully. sometimes you can't do that on one occasion. Listen, not try to solve the problem on the spot and say, "When can we meet again?" In the interval, be prayerful and thoughtful. Meeting again will be a way of carrying on the process of Apologetic work.

One on one apologetics has to be a Spirit led process of diagnosis. We really want the person to know that we are on their side. We are not against them. We are not trying to quash them or in any way manipulate them. We want them to know that we believe in a God who works with them. We have to be careful not to be in a position of closed mindedness, not listening, the idea that our task is to persuade these people, to win a war. Rather, we are with them.

That's where logic comes in as so important.

Jesus Use of Logic with Questions

[40:15]

One of the things most helpful in our work in Apologetics. When Jesus was engaging with people, He often would ask them questions that would lead them into what we call "Inthamemic Thinking" (?) - An Inthameme is an argument with something left out. Sometimes a conclusion, or a premise. The power of the "Inthameme" is that it engages the reasoning of the people who are listening. They are challenged to fill in the blanks. When they do, it comes from them, not from someone trying to manage them. it has a an all

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together difference on how they respond because they are dealing with a conviction that is their own.

* Jesus & Herodians

In a manner characteristic of Him, He left them totally without any gas. *"Now let me ask you a question, "What do you think of Christ? Whose Son is he?"*

They answered, *"David's Son."* Very skillfully, Jesus takes the passage out of Psalm 110. *"If the Messiah is David's son..."*

That was the background idea. When the Messiah came, he would fit in the pattern of David - the great Warrior. He led to the expansion of the nation of Israel geographically. He had ruled over surrounding territories. That's what they had in their minds.

When the Messiah comes, what's he going to be like?

Their answer was, he is going to be like David.

His response was as a question.

"If that is true, how doe David calling Him Lord?"

No Jewish Father calls his son Lord. He doesn't tell them that. He asks q question.

That pattern of reason becomes the standard part of the teaching in the early church. They had the problem of reinterpreting the Jewish experience and expectation of the Messiah. They had the problem interpreting that Jesus was the One. Jesus uses logic. That's different from using logic to hammer people into submission.

There is a time to stand up and argue like a Thrashing Machine. Some of us have the calling. William Lane Craig. Many campuses can't anyone to debate with him. He just knows the deal. After all, he does have the best case to argue. He let's the air out of all the balloons as they pass by. That's embarrassing when you have a Ph.D and some people think you are something.

We have the case when want to judge very carefully or we will be preaching to the choir. We will leave those who do not believe more angry and hostile than they every have been.

I think that's what Jesus did, what Paul did. We need to rethink the Sermon on Mars Hills. It is a mistake to call it a sermon. It was a very thoughtful, gentle, thoughtful approach into the minds of the people that were listening. He starts talking to the Greeks about the gods as they understand them.

From my own background that was so anti-intellectual, I've heard so many preachers say, "He tried philosophy and he failed." We should all have such

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failures. Mars Hill today the main street is "The Avenue of Paul the Apostle". Not bad after hundreds of years.

The effectiveness of our teaching is illustrated by he knew what he is doing, He was trusting God.

Apologetics on the Larger Scale

[48:30]

The attitude when we write books, speak to groups, go on University campuses we need to have the same spirit of Jesus in what we do. The same spirit does not mean intellectual mush. It means strict, logical rigor combined with humility and sweetness of spirit with a willingness to listen.

~ Debates - I will come and we will have a cooperative inquiry. I do that because I think if I go to expect them to have an open mind, I better not go with a closed mind. I go with the attitude, *"At least it is possible I might be wrong and might learn something."*

Having that attitude does not mean I am the least doubtful of what I present and what I believe. It does mean I'm there to listen. if I'm not there to listen I don't think I can expect the other person to be there to listen.

Openness of Inquiry is what people, especially in the University setting, pride themselves on. They tend to be close minded. People are just about as irrational there as truck stops or any other place in culture.

Specific Topics

[51:05]

~ "Bible" - a Source of Knowledge. What I am up against is a lot of people who have not seriously read the Bible have heard a lot of myths about it from Ph.D's and academic gowns.

~ "Evolution" - Relativity of Truth

When I approach those, I can not approach them with the attitude,

"I am not going not to listen to anything you are going to say."

That's precisely the attitude I have to get passed in them.

If you walk up to someone and say, *"The Bible is a reliable source of knowledge about the most important things in life."*

No, the Bible is a myth book. It is something people have engineered to control people.

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* "The DaVinci Code" spins off the myth that the Bible is an authoritative construction for purposes of repression. Who gets repressed? Women. Other stories that are not along the non-orthodox lines get repressed.

It is hard to say to people that the reason the Gnostics did not hold up very well was because it did not work, not because some people repressed their gospels.

We have to understand that the intellectual world that we address is an authoritarian myth structure. There is a lot of truth in it. We have to address that and thank God for the truth that is there. We have to approach it I believe, more that just saying in the spirit of Jesus - logical, sweet, listening and loving, that's important.

We have to approach it by finding a common ground from which we can honestly talk to one another about truth that is in the Bible and Jesus Christ.

~ ~ ~ **End of Teaching @ 54:00** ~ ~ ~

~ ~ **Q & A**

Q - [Inaudible]

A - [54:45] What do you mean "confrontational"? What do you do when you confront? Argue? That would mean you listened and responded, if that's confrontation, I am confrontational.

It is often done with hostility, closed-mindedness, even fearfulness. Confrontation can be done in a way that is counter-productive for the purposes of Christ. I don't think Paul ever did that.

"The servant of the Lord must not strive but be gentle." Paul to Timothy.

You can confrontational without striving. You can be confrontational and be gentle. That takes a lot of work to do that. In our world, many people think if you are gentle, your are not serious. If you are not hostile, maybe you don't believe what you say. I believe that is precisely what Paul talks about when he talks about "flesh".

If you mean by "confrontation" stating what you believe, giving your reasons why the other side view is not true, I am for it.

Q - Passion give authority?

A - I'll have to disagree with that. I may be wrong. I don't think passion gives authority. I will not encourage anyone to do it in the spirit of the Muslims I know.

* Zealous as Jehovah Witnesses - I disagree.

There is a place for passion. Jesus was passionate. Paul as passionate. But the teaching of both is be solid, be clear, be unyielding, do your best and let it stand. In my context of the University, people expect you to be passionate

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and stupid. The Europeans' problem is not a lack of passion, their problem is they don't believe anything.

Q - [58:25] "Manipulation". The unpredictability of Jesus' return. In what sense is it manipulation or what portion would you use in winning souls. What context would you use Jesus' second coming?

A - [59:25] That's an important thing to say to people. Anytime you straight forwardly say what you are trying to say, it is not manipulation. Saying, "Jesus may come at any moment" may be trying to instill fear in people and to get people to give in out of fear. We are not in charge of fear. If it causes people to be fearful, sometimes it is appropriate. If what I believe about Jesus is true, and I were living life on my own and unprepared to meet him, I would be afraid. If you are trying to generate fear just to motivate people, I would not do that. That is manipulation in a bad sense.

* If you tell them your house might burn down and they buy an insurance policy because of fear that their house might burn down, that's a good reason to buy an insurance policy.

It's when you try to use emotions alone to get people to do things. We are not in the business of getting anyone to do anything even at the level soul winning. We are helping them do something.

* In the U.S., a great deal of the problem is that ministers are in a position trying to get people to do things. It started out by trying to get people to come forward to profess Christ. Now they have a congregation full of people and their job is trying to get them to do things. I encourage everyone to just get out of that business. It isn't our job to try to get people to do things. It is our job to help people try to understand things, to see things. Sometimes they need help in making a decision. We can do that and that's good. And they need help in implementing and that is good too. We have to get out of the business trying to get people to do things and that's where manipulation goes wrong.

Q - [1:02:05] An evangelist of the early church was saving using the name of Jesus until the very last moment when he can do that.

When you say, "I am a Christian" is when people turn away.

A - [1:02:45] Start with the questions that are in their mind. With evangelization, you say it clearly and loudly and let people began to work on it. If my view of apologetics is right, you go with the questions that are on people's minds and you help them with those questions. It may not be a first anything to do with Christianity. It may be, "If there is a good God, why is there suffering?" If it was about Christianity, I would deal with that. If not, I would not.

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Q - Could our approach be to bring up questions that should be answered?

A - [1:04:05] Largely, that's what we do. We redirect the question in many cases and try to help the person ask the question that should be asked and answered. The cases with Jesus are cases in point. They are asking the wrong question. That had a question that arose out of their understanding of God. Reframing the question is basic apologetic work. What we want to get to is a question that the person can own. That's why listening is so important in the apologetic ministry. "The weapons are not carnal". We need a word of knowledge that comes from the Spirit. Sometimes the real issue is emotional and you need to identify that. I like to ask,

"What are you suffering from? What has hurt you?"

Q - [1:06:25] Is there a case to be made that "Method & Tone" might differ in one to one and another in the public arena or the media and that can be more confrontational? Can those two work together for the benefit of the Kingdom?

A - [1:07:00] My answer is yes, absolutely. I am very comfortable with the word "confrontation" if we are talking about issues. Especially in public work that is apologetic, you have to confront issues. That doesn't mean you don't listen. If you have not figured out what the questions are in your audience's mind, you'll be off over here in the air confronting issues no one is interested in. You still have to listen and to know your audience. In that sense, public apologetic work is still situational but it is not the kind of careful one on one work you do with an individual. There "confrontation" is not a good way. Honesty, thoroughness, I love those words. Not avoiding any issues. Helping people see where they might be wrong or are wrong, that's all good. Confrontational displays a spirit that seems out of place with individuals, especially if they are not in a public role.

Jesus was confrontational but rarely when He was working one on one. With Nicodemus in John 3 was confrontational. He did in a way that was gentle that led him out. When He is in the Temple with Pharisees & Scribes, man is He ever brutal. "Snakes!" He is dealing with someone in an official role and also, that's Jesus and not me and I can trust Jesus to do a lot of things with which I would never trust myself.

~ ~ ~ End of Session @ 1:09:44 ~ ~ ~

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