

One thing lacking

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- [0 : 0 0] I'd like us to turn now to our studies in the Gospel of Luke and to the part of that Gospel that we read together already. Luke chapter 18.
- And to the well-known story of the rich young ruler who came to Jesus. And we might look particularly at verse 22 of Luke chapter 18.
- Now when Jesus heard these things that the young ruler said, he said to the ruler, Yet lackest thou one thing.
- Sell all that thou hast and distribute unto the poor and thou shalt have treasure in heaven. And come, follow me. And I would like us to centre our thoughts particularly around Jesus saying to the man that he lacked one thing.
- You're lacking one thing. I suppose most of us at same time or another have known the frustration of doing a jigsaw and completing the jigsaw and finding that there is one piece lost.
- [1 : 2 6] It's not there. And I think those of us who have known that frustration have shared the feeling that it was almost not worth doing the jigsaw at all.
- Because at the end of it all, it remained incomplete. And look at the jigsaw as we may, looking for that feeling of satisfaction.
- We cannot help our eyes being drawn to the one piece missing. It spoils the whole thing. It wouldn't really be all that much different if there were quite a few pieces missing when there is one piece missing.
- And that really was the way with this rich young ruler. And that's why he left Jesus that day sad.
- Jesus had pointed out one thing that was missing in his life. And that one thing revealed the unfinished nature of his life.
- [2 : 4 3] He remained a sinner marred and spoiled by his sin. And the one thing was enough to make that clear.
- He had come looking for eternal life. He had come that Jesus might change him. That he might be made a new and complete man.
- But he couldn't deal with the one thing missing. And so it left him spoiled and marred. And I think what happens really when we read the story is that the one thing that Jesus highlights helps us to see that there were other things as well that were missing in this young man.
- And so I want to speak particularly tonight to anyone here who is not a Christian.
- Not a sincere follower of Jesus. And perhaps you focus on just one thing. And you feel that if this one thing could be dealt with then you would be a Christian.
- [4 : 1 8] Then you would be able to follow Jesus. The one thing may be the same as the man in the story. It may be quite different.
- The focus of your life as you think about Christianity, as you think about following Jesus, it may have to do with giving up something. This man was asked to give up his possessions.

Perhaps there is some pleasure or other in your life and you feel that if you were to be a follower of Jesus that one thing would have to be given up.

And it's proving a stumbling block. Perhaps it's just the fact of having to be counted among Christians.

That can often be the one thing that takes up people's attention as they look in on the people of God from outside and feel that they are not part.

[5 : 22] And they often convince themselves that they couldn't possibly be a part because they are seeing so many faults in these Christians. And that's the one thing that's proving a problem to you.

Perhaps it's that you want some particular experience. An emotional experience.

A dramatic experience. Some once-for-all experience. You've never felt that you've had that in your life and you feel that if only you could have this experience then you would be sure that you were a Christian.

Then you could contemplate following Jesus. But it would definitely require something definite. Something that I could feel. And this one thing is hindering you.

Because it's all that you concentrate on. Or perhaps this is common with many. You feel that there's a problem with perseverance.

[6 : 31] How could I be sure that I would stay the course if I was to become a Christian? If I was to follow Jesus?

I've seen others who professed that they were Christians. That something had changed in their lives and that they were now following Jesus as their Saviour and Lord.

But it didn't last. It may be lasted for weeks. It may be lasted for months. It may be lasted for years. But it didn't last. And that's the one thing in your experience that's taking up all your attention and it's actually hindering you from becoming a Christian.

one thing lacking. That's the way it was with the rich young ruler. And you see, you're so concentrating on that one thing that it's actually blinding you to perhaps more important issues that you should be facing up to if you're going to follow Jesus Christ.

And I want us to see that this one thing that Jesus put his finger on in the life of the rich young ruler was the one thing that hindered and that in the end highlighted that there were other things as well in the life of this man.

[8 : 03] But if the one thing had been dealt with then the other things would have fallen into place by the work of God's Spirit. And so I want to keep my concentration in what I want to say particularly on those who see themselves still outside of eternal life.

But I would like those who are already inside eternal life to recognise that the things that we're going to think about are things that you can also apply to your own life.

at least in two ways. It may be that you are not making progress as a Christian that you ought to be making.

It may be that you become somewhat stagnant in your spiritual life or even backslidden because the one usually leads to the other. and it's perhaps because there's one thing that you're making a stumbling blow and it's hindering you from seeing the other things that are behind it that you need to face up to to make new progress in following Jesus.

And then of course it may also help those who are Christians to think about the things we're going to think about in order that you may help other non-Christians.

[9 : 36] Because surely we want the sermon this evening not just to reach to unconverted people who are in this building this evening but we who are already Christians and we'll be thinking about this a little bit more after the service.

We have a responsibility to take what we hear and to use it to bring the gospel of Jesus to those who never come inside a church building.

And we have a responsibility in that connection every Sunday. So with that aside for those who are already Christians who are already following Jesus I turn again to focus on any here this evening who feel that they are not sincere followers of Jesus Christ as your Saviour and your Lord.

And I want to consider that Jesus is saying to you tonight you're lacking one thing. There's this one thing.

we've detailed the different one things that may be in your life. That's what's happening to you is what happened to the rich young ruler that this one thing that you keep focusing on it's hindering conviction of sin.

[11 : 04] That's the first thing that may be the problem with you so that you are not a Christian tonight. you're focusing in some way on one thing one difficulty that you feel and what it's actually doing is it's hindering you from thinking about your need to be convinced about your sin.

This surely was the way with this rich young ruler. He had a problem with sin and the problem he had with sin was that he didn't notice his sin.

That's surely abundantly clear when we look at the way that Jesus first confronts them with the law of God.

Think about the commandments how do they affect you Jesus said to the rich young ruler because if you're going to have eternal life you need to be affected by God's law and so Jesus details the commandments to him you know them he said and we have them there listed in verse 20 and the ruler replied all these have I kept from my youth act.

Now there's nothing here to suggest that the ruler was absolutely sincere in his reply and it may have been that to the best of his ability as far as he could see when he examined his life with his own eyes and with his own conscience he was really doing the best he possibly could and he would be the sort of man that people viewing him from outside even Christian people would have said he's a morally upright man and he keeps the commandments but he wasn't a Christian and he had a big problem with the law because he failed to see what was the central reason for God's law when it comes into the lives of sinful people who need eternal life and the Bible tells us very clearly that the law is to be our schoolmaster to lead us to Christ when the law is having a proper effect on our lives it's making us feel how sinful we are

[13 : 45] Paul bears testimony to that in the epistle to the Romans isn't it in chapter 7 when he says that he thought that he was okay but then the law came and God used his law to show to Paul just how he was falling so far short of the perfect law of God and he said when the law came sin revived and I died I saw in comparison with the law how sinful how evil how imperfect I was that there wasn't just one thing lacking but many things lacking and I died I felt quite limp and helpless and hopeless and pathetic that's the way a Christian sees the law that's the way that Paul saw the law but the rich young ruler didn't see the law in that way at all and he didn't know what it meant it seems for the law of

God to bring conviction of sin to make him feel that there was something wrong he didn't know the experience that those who listened to Peter on the day of Pentecost knew when they realized that they were implicated in the death of Jesus that their sin had nailed him to the cross so that they cry out with conviction of sin what must we do he didn't know anything of conviction of sin like the jailer in the jail in Philippi when God came in his power and caused the earthquake and Paul and Silas were released and the jailer realized that the holy God whom he had heard Paul and Silas singing to from the dungeons in the middle of the night he realized that this God was abroad and he was sinful in his presence what must I do to be saved he cried out with real conviction of sin and if you're not a Christian tonight surely you are lacking real conviction of sin the one thing is taking up your attention whatever it is and you're concentrating on this difficulty that you have with following

Jesus and the devil is using that one thing to focus your mind and your heart so that you are neglecting the greater things the sinfulness of your heart and the way that God hates sin and must judge sin you see sin is the only thing that keeps us from eternal life there's nothing else in all the world that keeps a man or a woman or a young person from God's eternal life but sin that's what keeps a person nothing else your background your church connection or your lack of it has nothing to do with whether you can have eternal life or not but your sin has something to do with it your age has nothing to do with it the particular personality that you are that's not what's keeping you from eternal life it's your sin sin is what separates us from our God and if we're to have eternal life it's only as our sin is dealt with by the

Lord Jesus Christ and we receive forgiveness from him by trusting in him so that our sin is blotted out in God's sight as our judge and our king if our sin is dealt with we have eternal life if our sin is not dealt with we do not have eternal life and yet we will concentrate on all sorts of things we will make all sorts of things a one thing for one person another one thing for another person and we will ponder it and every sermon you will hear you will say oh but and this one thing comes to the surface again and again and again oh that's all very well but and all the time you're neglecting to face up to sin now I think that there's little doubt that this man's materialism this man's fondness of his possessions was connected with his lack of conviction of sin he had got used to wanting things he had got used to the way of greed that

Alistair described for us so helpfully this morning and he wanted and he wanted and so sin was left in the background and I'm very fearful that that's what's happening in our evangelical community in these days the gospel has been preached as if it's something extra to want some extra possession that we can add to everything else that we have and we're more and more getting into the way of conceiving of a salvation where conviction of sin doesn't really matter oh yes people want an experience they want to feel converted and so you have so many professing

[20 : 23] Christians in our day and even in our own denomination and they profess to have this experience of conversion but they show so little of a sanctified lifestyle and the two do not go together because if we're converted the word that means turned or changed we're turned and converted from a way of sin to a way of righteousness and the one thing that we need if we're going to be saved is conviction of sin because a saviour dying so terribly on that accursed cross is surely irrelevant if sin is not playing a major part in our thoughts and in our feelings so I want you to think about your one thing tonight the objection that you're always raising and ask is it really the most important thing or do you need to be thinking more about your sin do you need to be thinking about the fact that without

Christ without his salvation you're on the road to a lost eternity you're on the way to hell and to the eternal judgment of almighty and holy god because you will not face us to your sin and how deep it is and how terrible it is and of course those of us who are already Christians need to be asking ourselves very seriously how much is conviction of sin a sensual experience of our daily living one thing was hindering conviction of sin and then the one thing was hindering sacrifice the one thing was hindering sacrifice you see

Jesus told the man what the one thing was in his experience just as he can tell you and I tonight what the one thing in our experience and if this one thing is sorted then by God's grace everything will come together and the jigsaw will be complete and we will know the completeness of a life saved by Jesus Christ and he said do this one thing and it will all fall into place now of course he didn't say do this one thing because to have eternal life depends on earning it and meriting it surely we know that if we know anything about the Bible because it's nothing to do with earning or meriting the Bible makes this so clear it's all of God's mercy and God's grace and God's free gift no

Jesus pinpointed the one thing that was hindering sacrifice because the sacrifice you see is the test God's test that reveals the condition of our wills we sang already this evening about being made willing in a day of God's power and if you're not a Christian tonight one thing that is certainly wrong whatever one thing you're concentrating on one thing is certainly wrong you're not willing to be a Christian your will is still wrong your will is still inadequate and whenever God comes with his salvation the will of a man the will of a woman that the will of a young person that is that part within us that makes us willing to do the thing that's got to be affected our catechism reminds us of that doesn't it when it gives us the answer to what's effectual calling in other words what happens when

God effectively calls somebody into his salvation remember effectual calling is a work of God's spirit whereby convincing us of our sin and misery and we've been dealing with that and enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ and renewing our will he doth persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ freely offered to us in the gospel oh that wonderful document the catechism is based on the word of God and here certainly a place where the importance of the renewed will is there in the scriptures this young ruler had so much that was good about him and the scriptures are very clear they're so honest in making it clear he had applied his mind to eternal life he was interested in these things he had thought about them something was going on in his mind when he came to

[26 : 58] Jesus and when he could talk about these things with Jesus it seems that his whole emotional state had been affected by this interest in spiritual things we read when we compare the gospel records that he came he ran to Jesus and he got down on his knees in front of Jesus he didn't come in a cool clinical way to Jesus it seems he came with emotion there was a keenness to deal with these things that when it came to his will when it came to his willingness the door was closed when he was challenged about showing a real evidence that he was ready that his heart his will was open to the lordship of

Jesus so that Jesus would be in control the one who was alone able to gift him eternal life he was not willing I wonder what he would have said if he was asked some general question about his willingness to follow Jesus if I were to ask those here this evening who are not convinced that they are followers of Jesus Christ and if I was to ask you in some general way do you desire to follow Jesus is there a concern with you to follow Jesus I think you would all say yes I think it's unlikely that you would be here without some impressions in your own heart about yourself that you have some desire for the right way that your will is moved and affected in some way but

Jesus doesn't ask general questions Jesus gives commands Jesus says if the deeds follow the heart is willing if the deeds don't follow the heart is unwilling there's no in between state you either have eternal life or you don't have it you're either a follower of me Jesus says or you're not a follower of me your heart is dedicated to me or your heart is not dedicated to me and so I'm picking on the one thing that will show if you really have that heart within that is willing to follow me as your saviour and your lord and if that one thing is lacking is really what

Jesus was saying to the rich young ruler everything is lacking and that's certainly the picture of the rich young ruler that we're left with whether it was one thing or a hundred things it made the difference between heaven and hell how do we prove our willingness that's really I think what's at the heart of this story and the very one thing that you're making a problem of is the one thing that you have to lay at the feet of Jesus and it's to be a problem no longer because you learn and you know and believe that

Jesus can deal with it and Jesus can save you difficulty and all I don't know what that one thing of sacrifice may be that Jesus may challenge you with tonight the thing that he will put his finger on it doesn't need to be the same thing as he used with the rich young ruler perhaps he wants you to give up going somewhere somewhere you go for your pleasure but it's really compromising a clear stance for Jesus we can go back to the children's address this morning we've got to spell out clearly if the light is going to shine if the salt is going to have its effect and you know that and there's one thing that would have to go and

[32 : 53] Jesus is saying take that one thing to me now he may be saying that to some Christian here tonight whose spiritual life is a mess and one thing could make all the difference I'll give it at Jesus tonight because you are the Lord you are the saviour and I want to follow you and I will follow you that's what happens when the Holy Spirit makes us willing in a day of his power yes maybe Jesus will put his finger on your possessions and he'll say to you they've got a hold of you and the only way that you'll be able to prove to yourself and to me that they're not going to have a hold on you any longer is to write out a check and to give it away to some needy cause that's what

Jesus was saying to this man do you think he has no right to say that to us in our materialistic Britain materialism that is crushing our churches what's one of the most obvious reasons that our churches are often so weak our congregation so weak so few people willing to take up the task within the congregation everybody is so busy building bigger barns one salary in a house is not enough it needs two salaries it needs as much salary as possible and people are working themselves into the ground for a life that's going to end in a few years and other people are crying out for eternal life and those who should be telling them about eternal life are so busy in this world that even if they wanted to they wouldn't have the energy to tell other people about

Jesus one thing is lacking in your life and Jesus says get that right and then you will have all the encouragement to know that I am making you willing in a day of my power maybe he wants you to come to the weekly prayer meeting those who are visitors here this evening may find that a very funny thing for me to be saying but in our tradition in the free church coming to the prayer meeting used to mean something and it's become very complicated and people are frightened to come in case too much will be expected of them in case it will appear that they are saying that they are converted and they have great assurance of conversion and it's become very complicated but maybe it is a stumbling block in your life and it's the one thing that's lacking you're keeping your distance and that's the evidence that you're not truly trusting in

Jesus in that way that will develop your assurance by the work of his spirit and you need to count yourself with the people of God no we have no right to say that your appearance at the prayer meeting means that you are definitely converted we have no right to say that but that's perhaps what you are needing to do because Jesus wants you to take a step and maybe there are those who are professing to be the Lord and that step that they perhaps took years ago and have neglected you need to start it again that your faith may be renewed and your assurance of God making you willing within is renewed and strengthened sacrifice is at the heart of being a

Christian there is no Christianity without sacrifice because for one thing to be a Christian we have to give up the sin that we love and we have to follow Christ and proclaim him the Christ whom the world hates but oh remember that any sacrifice we are called to from one angle it's not really sacrifice at all because doesn't Jesus say at the end of the section that we read there is no man that hath left house or parents or brethren or wife or children for the kingdom of God sake who shall not receive manifold more even in this present life but also in the world to come life everlasting what are you holding on to when

[38 : 58] Christ is saying give your all to me that you might have everlasting life the one thing was hindering conviction of sin the one thing was hindering sacrifice and the one thing was hindering the power of God that's what the test was about Jesus makes it clear to his disciples after the event it was about sacrifice but it was also about trusting in Jesus as the one who can bring us God's power the power of everlasting life you see Jesus pointed put his finger on the thing that was the most difficult thing in all the world for that man and he comments on it afterwards he says it may be impossible with men it's difficult for the rich to enter the kingdom because they're so taken up with this world but what's impossible with men is possible with

God that's what the rich young ruler didn't face up to he only saw how difficult he found it himself and he neglected to think that it was possible with God's power power that's why we have to follow Jesus because we need God's power and the two always go together God's power and faith remember where the gospels say that Jesus went into different places and he could do no mighty works there because of their unbelief where there's unbelief the power of God is not at work where there's belief the power of

God is at work that's what it comes to and that's the one thing that's necessary tonight if you've seen your sin if you've seen that you may have to give that match for Christ and if you're still concerned that you will cry like the Philippian jailer what must I do to be saved the word of God will come back the same tonight believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you'll be saved believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you'll have the power of God for with God nothing is impossible Amen