

Title:           **“Yet Lackest Thou One Thing”**  
Text:            Luke 18:18-27  
Subject:        *The Rich Young Ruler – Lessons about Salvation*  
Date:            Sunday Evening — November 7, 2004  
Tape #         Y-46b

### **Introduction:**

(Luke 18:18-27) “And a certain ruler asked him, saying, Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? (19) And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? none *is* good, save one, *that is*, God. (20) Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honour thy father and thy mother. (21) And he said, All these have I kept from my youth up. (22) Now when Jesus heard these things, he said unto him, 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. (23) And when he heard this, he was very sorrowful: for he was very rich. (24) And when Jesus saw that he was very sorrowful, he said, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! (25) For it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. (26) And they that heard *it* said, Who then can be saved? (27) And he said, The things which are impossible with men are possible with God.”

### **THREE TIMES**

This story of the rich young ruler is reported three times in the Gospels. Matthew, Mark and Luke were all inspired of God to record the history of the rich man who came to Christ. That fact alone is enough to call our attention to its importance. It tells us that there are lessons in the story that demand special attention. When the Lord Jesus restored Peter, he compelled him to confess his love for him three times (John 21). When the Lord God would impress upon that same disciple his commission to preach the gospel to the Gentiles, he sent him a vision which was repeated three times (Acts 10).

### **THE RICH RULER**

Here is a man who is anxious about his soul and concerned about eternal life. Such men are rare. **He was rich;** but he was concerned about his soul. **He was young;** but he was interested in eternity. **He was a ruler among men;** but he came to be taught by the Lord Jesus. This rich young ruler

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comes running up to Christ, and says, “*Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?*” **Our Lord knew the man’s heart.** He knew that this young man was **thoroughly familiar with the law of Moses.** And **he knew that the young man thought, like most people do, that eternal life could be gained by outward morality,** by obedience to the law. Therefore **he answered this young man according to the law.** He told him to keep the commandments. The rich young ruler responded, “*All these have I kept from my youth up.*” Then the Master said to him, – “*Yet lackest thou one thing.*” That is my subject this evening. I want, by the power of God, to press this one point home to your hearts. – **“YET LACKEST THOU ONE THING.”**

Some of you are, I do not doubt, like this rich young ruler. — “*Yet lackest thou one thing.*” You are very **moral.** — “*Yet lackest thou one thing.*” You are quite **respectable** in the eyes of men. — “*Yet lackest thou one thing.*” **You believe in God.** You believe **the Bible** to be the Word of God. And it can be said, at least in some sense, that you believe in **the Lord Jesus Christ.** You believe that he is God. You believe in his death, burial, and resurrection as the sinner’s Substitute. You even know that Jesus Christ the Lord is the sinner’s only Hope of salvation before God. Yet, for all that, you know that you are not a child of God, a saved man, and an heir to eternal life. Still, this is the state and condition of your soul. — “*Yet lackest thou one thing.*” — Many there are who are outwardly good, moral, respectable, religious people who yet lack that one thing which is essential to eternal life.

### **THE RULER’S QUESTION**

I. *First*, let’s look at **the question this rich young ruler asked the Lord Jesus.** — “*What shall I do to inherit eternal life?*” (v. 18).

(Luke 18:18) “And a certain ruler asked him, saying, Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”

This is a question people often ask when they are faced with eternity, when they hear the gospel preached, when their sin is exposed, and they are terrified with the thought of everlasting hell. I have heard it many times.

- The Jews, the publicans, and the soldiers, one after another asked the Savior, “*What shall we do then?*” (Luke 3:10, 12, 14).

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- The men of Judea asked Peter and the disciples, “*What shall we do?*” (Acts 2:37).
- The Philippian jailer asked Paul and Silas, “*Sirs, what must I do to be saved?*” (Acts 16:30).

**Looking at this question by itself, it appears to be a very noble one**, one that we all should ask. We have seen this question many times in the Scriptures. And many who asked it became believers and were saved by the grace of God. They were given eternal life. **On the day of Pentecost**, a large number of men, after they heard the gospel message, were pricked in their hearts; and they cried, “*Men and brethren, What shall we do?*” **The Philippian jailer**, with a broken and submissive heart cried, “*Sirs, what must I do to be saved?*”

**But there was a great difference as this rich young ruler asked this question. His heart was not broken with conviction. His soul was not humbled with a sense of sin. He was proud and self-righteous.** He felt that he was sufficient in himself to meet whatever might be required of him. **In essence, he was saying to the Lord Jesus**, “You tell me what God requires, and I will do it!” He had a zeal of righteousness and going about to establish his own righteousness, he had not submitted (and would not submit) himself to the righteousness of God” (Rom. 10:3-4).

(Romans 9:31-33) “But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. (32) Wherefore? Because *they sought it* not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumblingstone; (33) As it is written, Behold, I lay in Sion a stumblingstone and rock of offence: and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.”

(Romans 10:1-4) “Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. (2) For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. (3) For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. (4) For Christ *is* the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.”

**How many there are like those Jews and like this rich young ruler: very moral, very proud, and very lost!**

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**A. There is much about this young man that is commendable.**

He was not a base, profligate rebel. He was moral, religious, and devout. He had been a respectful and obedient son to his parents. He was a good husband, a good father, and a good provider for his family. He was a hardworking, honest man, who had acquired much wealth. He was a good neighbor, a respected community leader.

**In a day of abounding unbelief, he comes to Christ of his own accord. He came, not to have some disease healed, not to plead for a helpless child, not to see some great miracle, but out of concern for his immortal soul.**

1. He was **earnest and sincere.** – Mark tells us that he came running to Christ.
2. He was **orthodox in his creed.** – This young man was a religious leader. He believed in **God.** He believed **the Holy Scriptures.** He believed in the reality of **eternal life.**
3. He was very **strict and devout** in his practice of religion. Since the days of his youth, he had outwardly kept the law of God. His life was meticulously moral and precise.
4. And he even **worshipped Christ.** – Again, Mark tells us that when he came to Christ, he knelt down before him. Like Nicodemus, this young man realized that Jesus Christ was a teacher come from God.

He seems even to have acknowledged our Lord’s Deity. When the Lord asserted that no man is good, but God only, the young ruler did not withdraw his statement. He seems to have acknowledged that Christ is God.

**B. Yet, this young man demonstrated two very sorrowful characteristics.** — Two things about this rich young ruler’s character show us that he was a lost, ruined, unregenerate man.

1. **He was ignorant of all spiritual truth.** — He knew much in a natural sense, but spiritually, regarding spiritual things, he was as ignorant as a man who had never heard of God.

- He was ignorant of **God’s holy character.**
- He was ignorant of **his own sinfulness.**

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- He was ignorant of **the law’s spiritual nature**. – He thought that the law only required outward obedience.
- He was altogether ignorant of **the gospel of Christ** (Eph. 2:8-9).

(Ephesians 2:8-9) “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God: (9) Not of works, lest any man should boast.”

### 2. **And this rich young ruler was dreadfully self-righteous.**

Beware of self-righteousness! You, who are moral, but lost, beware of self-righteousness! No sin is more deadly, and more likely to keep you from Christ than the sin of self-righteousness. And no sin is more common to man.

### C. **The Lord Jesus answered this man’s question plainly.**

The man asked what he could do to win God’s favor, and Christ told him. If you want salvation by human merit, you have got to keep the law!

(Luke 18:19-20) “And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? none *is* good, save one, *that is*, God. (20) Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honour thy father and thy mother.”

As far as he understood the law, in its outward requirement, he had kept it. He was like Paul, “*as touching the law, blameless.*”

(Luke 18:21) “And he said, All these have I kept from my youth up.”

But **he was not all that he thought he was**. He did not, in reality keep the commandments.

1. The law must be kept perfectly.
2. The law must be kept in all points.
3. The law must be kept at all times.
4. The law must be kept outwardly.
5. The law must be kept inwardly.

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God never intended the law to be a means of salvation. Its design is to show man God’s holy character and his own condemnation and guilt. The law condemns, but can never give life. The law demands, but can never give grace.

“Run,” “do,” and “work,” the law commands,  
But gives me neither feet nor hands.

(Romans 3:20) “Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law *is* the knowledge of sin.”

(Galatians 2:16) “Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.”

(Galatians 3:10) “For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed *is* every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.”

God requires “*truth in the inward parts.*” We break the commandments of the law in our hearts and thoughts, even when we do not break them in outward actions (Psalm 51:6; Matt. 5:21-28). To be delivered from such blindness regarding ourselves is one of the first things needful to our salvation. The eyes of our understandings must be enlightened by the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:18). We must learn to know ourselves. No man really taught of the Spirit will ever talk of having kept God's holy law. Those who are taught of God confess with Paul, “*The law is spiritual, but I am carnal.*” “*I know that in me dwells no good thing*” (Rom. 7:14-18).

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II. **Second, I want us to see what the Lord Jesus said to this rich young ruler.** — “*Yet lackest thou one thing*” (v. 22).

(Luke 18:22) “Now when Jesus heard these things, he said unto him, 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.”

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If one of our modern soul-winners could find a young man like this, he would have him under the water, dried off, and in the pulpit in no time. But our Lord was not trying to get another decision to put on his promotional charts as a “soul-winning evangelist.” He labored for the souls of men. He was both compassionate and honest. Therefore he showed the young man exactly what he lacked.

- He was not lacking in morality.
- He was not lacking in religious duty.
- He was not lacking in orthodoxy.
- He was not lacking in sincerity.
- He was not lacking in zeal.

**But he was lacking one essential thing.** What was that one thing he lacked? What is that one thing you lack? What is that one thing we must have if we would inherit eternal life? – Faith in Christ!

*“Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest”* (Mark 10:21). — The young man boasted that he loved his neighbor as himself, that he honored his parents, that he kept the commandments. Therefore Christ put him to a test. The Lord Jesus said to him, *“Sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me”* (v. 22).

1. Look at this command for a moment. **It is a fourfold commandment.**

- a. **Our Lord commanded this young man to surrender to his authority as his Lord.** – *“Sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor.”*
- b. **Our Lord commands the man to trust him.** He said, *“Come.”* To come to Christ is to believe him. It is faith in him. — *“He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is the Rewarder of them that diligently seek him.”*
- c. **Mark adds these words.** – *“Take up thy cross.”* That is to say, Our Lord commanded the man to **confess him.**
- d. **And he commanded this young man to obey him.** – He said, *“Follow me.”*

These are the things, which our Lord requires of all his people – Submission, Faith, Confession, and Obedience.

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2. **The Lord had a good reason for giving this command to this particular man.** — He was probing at the young man’s heart. He wanted to expose his point of rebellion. He was determined to show this young man exactly what he was lacking. — **God always meets the sinner at his point of rebellion.** – This man’s money was his god. That was his point of rebellion.

“We must be willing to part with anything, however dear it may be, if it stands between us and our salvation. We must be ready to cut off the right hand and pluck out the right eye, to make any sacrifice, and to break any idol. Life, we must remember, eternal life is at stake! One leak neglected, is enough to sink a mighty ship. One besetting sin, obstinately clung to, is enough to shut a soul out of heaven. The love of money, secretly nourished in the heart, is enough to bring a man, in other respects moral and irreproachable, down to the pit of hell.”

*J. C. Ryle*

- a. This command was designed to **expose the evil of this young man’s heart.**
- b. It was designed to **destroy his self-confidence and pride.**
- c. It was designed to show **the impossibility of salvation by the works of the law.**
- d. This command was designed to show this sinner **the necessity of the gospel.**

By this one, pointed command, our Lord stripped away the fig leaves of this man’s self-righteousness, exposed the foolishness of his pride, and showed him his need of the grace of God and his need of a Substitute.

**C. The rich young ruler’s one fatal deficiency was a deficiency of the heart.**

Like Simon Magus, his heart was not right in the sight of God. He was yet unregenerate. He was in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity. His heart was not broken. His Spirit was not humbled.



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1. He would not surrender to Christ as Lord. – God met him at his point of rebellion, and he would not bow.
2. He would not come to Christ alone, trusting him alone for salvation.
3. He would not confess Christ as Lord.
4. He would not obey Christ in all points.

(Luke 18:23) “And when he heard this, he was very sorrowful: for he was very rich.”

**D. Are you like this young man? Might our Savior’s words to him be addressed to you? “Yet lackest thou one thing.”**

You have one fatal deficiency. Your heart is not right before God.

1. **If ever you are saved, your heart must be broken** (Ps. 51:17; Isa. 66:2).

(Psalms 51:17) “The sacrifices of God *are* a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.”

(Isaiah 66:2) “For all those *things* hath mine hand made, and all those *things* have been, saith the LORD: but to this *man* will I look, *even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.*”

- **The only way for a man’s heart to truly be broken is for God to reveal himself, in the fulness of his grace and glory in Christ** (Zech. 12:10).

(Zechariah 12:10) “And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for *his* only *son*, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for *his* firstborn.”

- **Unless God himself breaks your heart, it will never be broken; and you will never be saved.**
2. **You must be born again by almighty grace. A new heart must be created within you.**

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### AN IMPOSSIBLE TASK

III. Now, *thirdly*, I want you to see **the Master’s response to this rich young ruler’s response** (vv. 24-25).

(Luke 18:24-25) “And when Jesus saw that he was very sorrowful, he said, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! (25) For it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.”

This is a fact we see confirmed on every side. Our own eyes will tell us that **grace and riches seldom go together**. — “*Not many mighty, not many noble, are called*” (1 Cor. 1:26). It is plain matter of fact that comparatively few rich men are to be found in the way of life. — Why?

- For one thing, riches incline their possessors to pride, self-will, self-indulgence, and love of the world.
- For another thing, the rich are seldom dealt with faithfully about their souls. They are generally flattered and fawned over by preachers. — “*The rich has many friends*” (Prov. 14:20). Few people have the courage to tell him the whole truth. They are flattered, bragged on, and doted over. The result is, that while their hearts are choked with the things of the world, their eyes are blinded to their own condition before God.

We are fools to envy the rich of this world and their possessions. If we had what they have, we would probably be like them, as the stalled ox being fattened for the slaughter. Money, craved, longed for, coveted, adored money, keeps myriads of souls out of heaven! “*Those who will be rich fall into temptation and a snare.*” Happy is he who has learned to pray, “*Give me neither poverty nor riches,*” and is really “*content with such things as he has*” (1 Tim. 6:9; Prov. 30:8; Heb. 13:5).

Many try to make our Master’s words mean less than they do; but they mean exactly what they appear to mean. No more and no less. — “*How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.*”

### WHO THEN?

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IV. When the disciples saw and heard these things, they were astonished, and cried – **“Who then can be saved?”**— Our Lord gives us a plain answer to that question (vv. 26-27).

(Luke 18:26-27) “And they that heard *it* said, Who then can be saved? (27) And he said, The things which are impossible with men are possible with God.”

The word of God gives us many striking instances of rich men who were saved. Abraham, David, Solomon, Hezekiah, Jehoshaphat, Josiah, Job, and Daniel, were all very great and wealthy men in this world. Yet they all were all sinners saved by the grace of God. And what God did for them by his grace he can do for any, even for you and for me.

**With men, any men and all men, salvation is impossible.** But, blessed be God, “*The things which are impossible with men are possible with God!*” That means my case is not hopeless. That means your case is not hopeless. It matters not who we are, where we live, what our position in this world is, whether rich or poor, moral or immoral, great or insignificant, “*The things which are impossible with men are possible with God!*” Grace, and not place, is the hinge upon which salvation turns.

(John 1:12-13) “But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, *even* to them that believe on his name: (13) Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”

(Romans 9:15-16) “For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. (16) So then *it is* not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy.”

(Ephesians 2:8-9) “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God: (9) Not of works, lest any man should boast.”

(Psalms 65:4) “Blessed *is the man whom* thou choosest, and causest to approach *unto thee*, that he may dwell in thy courts: we shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy house, *even* of thy holy temple.”

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(Psalms 110:3) “Thy people *shall be* willing in the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning: thou hast the dew of thy youth.”

**If ever the Almighty God puts his hand upon you, you will be saved.** —  
 “*Who then can be saved?*” I will tell you who –

1. All who are redeemed by the blood of Christ.
2. All who are born-again by God the Holy Spirit.
3. All who are called by almighty grace.
4. All who come to Christ.

“*Who then can be saved?*” — If you are not saved, it is not because there is no love in Christ for sinners. It is not because Christ is not able, willing, and ready to save sinners. If you are not saved, it is because, “*Ye will not come to Christ, that ye might have life.*” It is because “*yet lackest thou one thing.*” It is because you cling refuse to choose that “*One Thing needful,*” the One Thing you must have, Christ Jesus the Lord (Luke 10:42).

(Luke 10:42) “But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.”

If you do come to Christ, if you choose that “*One Thing needful,*” if you are saved, it will be due entirely to the grace of God. May God give his grace and cause you now to choose “*that good part,*” Christ Jesus. If he will, you will possess him forever. He is the One thing that “*shall not be taken away*” from you.

**JESUS! ENGRAVE IT ON MY HEART**

*Samuel Medley*

Jesus! engrave it on my heart,  
 That Thou the One thing needful art:  
 I could from all things parted be,  
 But never, never, Lord, from Thee!

Needful art Thou to make me live;  
 Needful art Thou all grace to give;  
 Needful to guide me, lest I stray;  
 Needful to help me every day.

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Needful is Thy most precious blood,  
To reconcile my soul to God;  
Needful is Thy indulgent care;  
Needful Thy all prevailing prayer.

Needful Thy presence, dearest Lord!  
True peace and comfort to afford;  
Needful Thy promise, to impart  
Fresh life and vigor to my heart.

Needful art Thou, my Guide! my Stay!  
Through all life's dark and thorny way;  
In death Thou wilt most needful be,  
To bring my spirit home to Thee.

Needful art Thou, to raise my dust  
In shining glory with the just;  
Needful when I in heaven appear,  
To crown and to present me there.

Then needful still my God! my King!  
Thy Name eternally I'll sing:  
Glory and praise be ever His,  
The One Thing needful, Jesus is!

Amen.