

One thing you lack

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[0 : 0 0] Let's pray together. Father, we ask that as we meet, you will help us to be those who hear and obey your word. And we ask this in Christ's name. Amen.

Well, it's good to see the microphone is still working at this point. Last week we began to study the Gospel of Luke. We looked at chapter 10. And we took a moment to think about the journey Jesus undertakes in Luke's Gospel.

In chapter 9 verse 51, Luke tells us that when the days drew near for Jesus to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.

And he and the disciples begin a journey to the capital. And as he goes, Jesus begins to teach his followers. He teaches them about different subjects. The prayer and the Christian life.

The role of signs. The Christian attitude to money. And halfway through his journey, he stops in chapter 13. And he begins to speak about Jerusalem.

[1 : 0 8] In verse 33 he says, I must go on my way today and tomorrow and the day following. For it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem. He and the disciples then continue their journey.

Until chapter 19. And during these six chapters, he revisits the same subjects. He teaches about prayer. He teaches about signs. He teaches about money. And we considered how Luke gives us two sides of the same topic.

A bit like a pair of 3D glasses. He gives us two images which when put together, help us to understand an issue in three dimensions. To gain a sense of balance in our Christian lives.

So last week we studied two stories with unexpected endings. We considered the first story about a young lawyer, an expert in the law. And he asked Jesus the question, what must I do to inherit eternal life?

And there then followed a dialogue about how to be justified before God. He sought to justify himself. But Jesus showed him, although he'd heard the law, he wasn't obeying it.

[2 : 2 2] He wasn't showing mercy. He wasn't loving his neighbour as himself. In fact, the example he gave was not a religious leader, but a hated Samaritan. A very unexpected ending to a story told to a man who tried to justify himself.

And we considered how Paul makes this explicit in his letter to Titus. That we are saved not because of works done in righteousness, but because of God's mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour, so that being justified by grace, we might become heirs, we might inherit eternal life.

Salvation is by grace we cannot justify ourselves. And then Luke gives us another story, related to the first of two ladies, Mary and Martha. Jesus goes to their home.

Martha's very busy preparing a lovely meal to share, very important hospitality. But Mary is sitting at Jesus' feet. And really it's the story of somebody who lacks one thing.

Jesus said to Martha, only one thing is needed, one thing you lack, which is to sit at my feet, to listen to my teaching, and to have a personal faith in me.

[3 : 42] Two stories. One of somebody seeking to justify themselves, and one of somebody who lacked something essential in their Christian life.

And as we get to Luke 18, we find the same question coming up, verse 18. Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life? So we're on familiar ground.

And as we study the passage read to us, we notice that there are certain common themes in these two stories. The Pharisee and the tax collector is a story with an unexpected ending.

It's a story about somebody who seeks to justify themselves before God. And the second story, that of a rich young man, we find somebody who is lacking one thing.

Who is lacking the one thing which is needful. Which is a personal faith in Christ. So I want to look at these two stories together, and draw out three themes from them.

[4 : 44] Firstly, there are two different ways to approach God. Secondly, the two different responses to Christ. And thirdly, the two sacrifices that must be made. Two ways to approach God.

One of the TV programs Helen and I like to watch, we don't watch much, but we like to watch The Apprentice. I imagine you're familiar with it. It's not a documentary based on this church, following the lives of Phil and Andy and so on.

No, Andy, Phil I should say, does a very good impression of The Apprentice. It's really, they get a group of young business people, they give them the opportunity to work with Lord Sugar, and they give them various tasks.

And it's really an exercise in self-promotion. People say the most remarkable things. Somebody said at the start, don't tell me the sky when there are footprints on the moon.

Things like that. Sort of very boastful, self-aggrandisement things. And really what these contestants are trying to do is to sufficiently impress Lord Sugar, that he will accept them, that he will give them a job, or he will give them some money to enter into business with him.

[5 : 57] And I think some people think of faith a bit like that, don't we? Trying to impress God in some way. Trying to convince him that we are worth his time and his effort and his energy.

And the Pharisee certainly thought that way. Chapter 18, verse 9. He told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and treated others with contempt.

We have a story with a surprise. There are two men in this story. The first is a Pharisee, a religious leader, a teacher of the law, one of the aristocratic people of Jerusalem.

And the other is a tax collector, a despised, lowly, unclean traitor, loathed by his people. Opposite ends of the social spectrum.

And these two men have very different approaches to God. The Pharisee is like somebody off the apprentice. He comes up to God and verse 11 tries to impress him. He stands alone.

[7 : 01] He sets himself apart from others. And he says, Oh God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.

I fast twice a week. I give tithes of all I get. He prays to God, but he speaks an awful lot about himself. And that's to be contrasted with the attitude of the tax collector, verse 13.

He stands far off. He would not even lift his eyes to heaven. But he beats his breast as if mourning over his sin and says, God, be merciful to me, a sinner.

Two people, opposite ends of the social and religious spectrum, two different attitudes to God. And the story has a surprise ending, doesn't it? Verse 14, Jesus says, This man, the tax collector, went to his house justified rather than the other.

What is the reason for that? Well, verse 13, his prayer, God, be merciful to me, a sinner.

[8 : 13] Last week, we considered mercy in the context of loving our neighbour and how none of us have fulfilled the law in its entirety. We failed to love our neighbour and consequently, we need God's mercy.

But the word here is a different word and it's sometimes translated propitiation or atonement. So the tax collector is saying, God, make atonement for my sin for I am a sinner.

Make propitiation for my sin for I am a sinner. It's quite striking. The Pharisee trusted in the works of the law for his righteousness.

The tax collector, however, trusted in the atonement of the propitiation given by God. The Pharisee exalted himself and was consequently humbled and the tax collector humbled himself and was exalted.

So Luke is giving us a picture. Two men, two ends of the social spectrum and a very surprising turnaround. The religious man goes home exactly as he arrived and the tax collector goes home justified.

[9 : 22] It is a picture of Paul's doctrine which we have been studying in Romans. Chapter 3 tells us that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood to be received by faith.

Paul is saying and Luke is illustrating for us that we cannot be justified by works of righteousness. We are justified by faith apart from works of the law.

He gives us a story with a surprise twist to make that point abundantly clear. And having dealt with that topic he well we need to think don't we about how that works out in our own experience.

This seems to be very much the wisdom of age doesn't it the attitude of the Pharisee only a few days ago we had a very pleasant lady in the bookshop and we were speaking of these matters of how to get right with God how to find acceptance with God and she said something I've heard said many many times which was this well so long as you live a decent life so long as you don't hurt anyone at the end of it all God will probably accept you.

It's not this similar is it to verse 11 I thank you that I'm not an extortioner not unjust not an adulterer that I'm not a tax collector. It is very much the wisdom of this age that God will settle for a half respectable half decent life and yet this passage in Luke pulls the rug from under the feet of such an argument God be merciful to me a sinner all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified not by their own works but by his grace through Christ.

[11 : 28] And Luke moves on to develop his theme and we then have these two stories one of the children coming to Jesus and one of the rich ruler and I think it's very important we consider these two stories together because Luke keeps them together Matthew keeps them together Mark keeps them together and so they must in some way be related and I want to study together and consider how that might be.

and I think really the two stories have to do with hindrances to coming to faith it is so important in life that we are not hindered in achieving what we want to achieve Ernest Shackleton is one of my heroes one of my secular heroes and Rupert will laugh because I always talk about Shackleton when I'm looking for a good story he was a Victorian adventurer who went off to Antarctica with a bunch of men and he wanted really to walk across Antarctica perhaps unsurprisingly his boat got stuck in the ice it was crushed and they had to evacuate the boat and continue their journey back to the coast on foot as they were evacuating Shackleton was very strict and he said to his men I'm only going to permit you to take two pounds of personal possessions less than one kilogram that is even less than the baggage allowance on a budget airline flight and this was to last them for months so they threw all sorts of things out they threw out gold sovereigns they threw out a gold watch he'd been given a bible by the queen he kept two pages of it and had to leave the rest he threw out 300 photographs that his official photographer had taken and this was in the day before digital prints these were big photographs for some reason they kept a banjo these men knew they had a difficult task ahead of them and he said we mustn't be hindered in achieving our goal we are only going to take two pounds of possessions and I think that's the theme that holds these two stories together

I believe they're related firstly in their subject verse 17 of chapter 18 says this truly I say to you whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it so the subject is entry into the kingdom verse 24 with the rich young ruler Jesus says how difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God so they deal with the subject of how we are to enter the kingdom and they provide the answer that the way to enter the kingdom is to come to Christ verse 16 Jesus says let the children come to me and verse 22 the invitation he gives to this young man sell all you have distribute to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven and come follow me to enter the kingdom we need to come to Christ and yet in each story there is something which hinders them for the young children verse 16 it's the disciples we saw that in the Mark drama yesterday they were saying this isn't a crash take the kids out of here the disciples were hindering the children coming to Christ but in the story of the lawyer excuse me the rich man it is the man himself and his fixation with his wealth and his riches which stops him coming to the Lord two people opposite ends of the social ladder with the same issue how do we get into the kingdom and the same problem something was hindering them and I think Luke deliberately puts these stories together to show the contrast children really didn't have very much value in the ancient world in the modern world of course we love children politicians like to kiss them they go and visit primary schools and so on we put a great emphasis upon spending time with children but in the ancient world well infant mortality was high children were expensive they couldn't work sometimes they would just be abandoned it was said that only a fool would spend time talking to a child they really weren't very important but this rich ruler on the other hand well he was a very important rich he was a ruler of the people he was verse 20 an upstanding moral man a pillar of the community sometimes we meet people who just seem to have it all

I met one once it was a chap at university he was very tall dark handsome before he'd come to university he'd been working as a male model more than that he used to make the musical instruments himself which he would then play and he was very intelligent he never did any work and he got a first sometimes you meet the rich young man and I just felt utterly inferior compared to this chap so we have these two people side by side little children of no significance to anyone and this wonderful rich moral upstanding ruler with the same issue how do we get into the kingdom Luke makes abundantly clear the rich young man is hindered by his wealth Jesus begins with him the same way he began with the lawyer in chapter 10 you know the commandments don't commit adultery don't murder don't steal don't bear false witness honour your father and mother he tests his obedience as the young man says very confidently as if he was on the apprentice all these I have kept from my youth but as Jesus did with the lawyer he then asks a second question to challenge this young man's obedience and he says one thing you lack sell all that you have and distribute to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven and come follow me if you want to obey God says Jesus you need to remove anything which is stopping you coming to me and receiving eternal life and entering the kingdom and this young man went away very sad because he had great wealth and what the

Lord does with him is just so precise isn't it the commandments he lifts they're commandments alright but they're from the second table of the law in a sense they deal with our relationship with other people with family with property that kind of thing and the Lord didn't say to him the first commandment you shall have no other gods before me and yet it's abundantly clear that that was precisely the issue this man had that he was quite plainly an idolater something was more important to him than worshipping and serving the living God of heaven and that was his wealth his status his property his place within the community the psalmist writes the idols of the nations are silver and gold the work of human hands and in those days people used to make idols quite literally of silver and gold and bow down to them but in the time of Christ and in our own days the idols are still silver and gold although we might not fashion statuettes out of them they still control our lives and they still displace

[19:19] God from his rightful place this young man was not willing to worship God wholeheartedly and as a consequence he could not follow the Messiah he was more concerned with earthly treasure than heavenly treasure the one thing he lacked was wholehearted obedience to God and a wholehearted following of the Lord Jesus Christ and Jesus says in verse 24 how difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God the illustration is exactly what it says a camel is a very large animal a needle is a very small tool and Jesus says it is harder for a rich person to enter the kingdom than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle it is really a picture of impossibility and that's certainly often our experience isn't it last week we had Alan

Parsar from Crosslink and I was speaking with him about the work of that mission agency and he said they did some research and they plotted collected data I'm not entirely sure what they did with it but they got all this data about GDP that is the wealth of a country and they collected some data about lifespan how long people live and then they looked at the state of the church the progress of the gospel in these countries and what they found was as GDP and life expectancy went up zeal and the strength and the witness of the gospel went down so a country like Tanzania a very poor country a great many problems very low life expectancy the church was on fire and the gospel was spreading and bearing fruit but a country like Belgium Switzerland very wealthy very prosperous and the church was very small and very weak how difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of

God I remember an Australian preacher saying a few years ago people in Sydney don't think about heaven because they think they already live there the same attitude that a colleague of mine said to me one day I have no need of your God because I already have everything that I want how difficult it is for those to have wealth it in fact requires nothing less verse 27 than the power of God to soften people's hearts and to lead them to follow Christ and I think that's the contrast with the children you see they were being hindered by the disciples but they weren't being hindered by all these other things all this worry about money about status about prosperity about their standing in the community they came to Jesus with empty hands and with open arms I did an experiment this afternoon I took all the things that we consider important and I brought them to Anna I gave her some money and she held it then she just sort of dropped it

I gave her my credit card she put it in her mouth and she dropped it a few days ago I gave her one of my essays see what she thought of it she sort of played with it a little while and dropped it and it just reminds us doesn't it that the things that we consider so important are of no consequence to a child the things this rich young man considered so important his money his status his reputation were of no consequence to the children and that is why they could come to Jesus to receive the kingdom and to enter in not so this man Tim Keller defines an idol as anything more important to you than God anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God anything you seek to give you what only God can give for many people money is an idol they are not willing to part with it it is the one thing they lack the ability to separate themselves from their money but there are many other things many other idols in our society and let me ask you friends are you an idolater is there one thing you lack is there one thing which is keeping you from wholeheartedly following Christ and entering into his kingdom is it your career

I had a very frank discussion with a Chinese professional when I was in Durham she said I love to learn about Christianity but I'll never become a Christian because I'm a communist and if I do I'll lose my job is it your reputation what will my friends think if I tell them I went to the Mark drama and on Friday night I slip out to Christianity to explore and on Sunday I'm professing faith what will the people in the dorm think or the people in the union what about my colleagues at work is your reputation so important that you cannot give it up or is it your personal freedom the thing we found most at university I seem to recall was people would come to some understanding about Christ and who he is and what he's done and they realised that to follow him they would have to give up their personal autonomy that he would have to be Lord especially in the realm of their sexual freedom and for many people they said I am simply not willing to do that they lacked one thing one area of their life that so controlled them that they were not willing to give it up even for

[25 : 13] God so friend do you lack one thing this young man went away very sad the psalmist says that those who run after other gods their sorrows will increase but Jesus says come follow me and enter into the kingdom two stories two groups of people at different ends of the social spectrum two unexpected endings we cannot justify ourselves one thing this young man lacked and that we ourselves often lack but Luke then reminds us very finally of two sacrifices Peter has a question for him well what about us verse 28 we have left our homes and followed you why does he speak of homes from what I gather from reading this week in the Middle East home and family were the cultural absolutes they were the two most important things people went to great lengths to keep the entire family living in one house to keep the family together and for each generation to look after one another to leave a home and to follow someone else showed that your loyalty to Jesus to that person was higher than your loyalty to the cultural absolute

Jesus was more important than what everyone else considered to be the most important thing so he's not saying here that we're to dissolve marriages break ties to family and so on but as one author writes he teaches us to give honour and priority to our fear of God over marriage brothers race and relatives Jesus Christ has to be the number one priority in our lives and Peter says well we've left our homes what does that mean are we saved and Jesus reassures in verse 29 I say to you there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God who will not receive many times more in this time and in the age to come eternal life unlike the rich young man they were willing to part with the things that kept them from Christ and he says therefore you will receive eternal life but more than that verse 30 you will receive many times more in this time he's not specific about what he means but Jesus promises in some sense that God is no man's debtor that he will provide for their needs that he will make up in some way for the things they have given up the other gospels explain this in terms of houses and families being part of the extended body of Christ but Luke isn't specific

Jesus writes to comfort the disciples that if they give up something for God it will not go unnoticed and God will bless them for the step of faith they have taken and that's always been the way hasn't it when people have made great steps of faith you think of Abraham and he like the disciples was called to go from his house God said to him go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land I will show you and he took that step of faith and what happened God made of him a great nation and blessed him and made his name great and through him all the earth has been blessed a small step of faith an old man moving across the Middle East and as a consequence salvation has come to the world or we think of Ruth who married a Hebrew male who died she was widowed and her mother-in-law Naomi was returning home to Israel and Naomi said to them go home go back to your people go back to your mother's house go back to your gods but Ruth had become a believer in the one true

God and she said to Naomi do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you but where you go I will go where you lodge I will lodge your people should be my people and your God my God another small step of faith a Moabitess leaving her mother's house and her people to go and live in a neighbouring country and God honoured that didn't he and gave her a husband gave her a son gave her a descendant in the form of David and made her part of the Messiah's family tree one of her descendants being the son of God himself and that's true of the apostles Peter doesn't know it yet but God will do something wonderful with them and in Revelation 21 we're told that when the heavenly Jerusalem descends that city of pure gold the wall of the city will have twelve foundations and on them will be written the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the land

Peter exchanged a few boats a few nets and a few fish he took a step of faith and God honoured that and will write his name on the foundations of the eternal city you will receive many times more in this time and in the age to come eternal life and Jesus Luke rather goes on to tell us that whatever sacrifice we make will be viewed in relation is viewed rather sorry in relation to Christ he takes the twelve and he says to them we are going up to Jerusalem and everything written about the son of man by the prophets will be accomplished he will be delivered to the Gentiles will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon after flogging him they will kill him and on the third day he will rise Jesus draws their attention to his impending death and resurrection and it is in this passage that we find the answer to the questions

[31 : 31] Luke has been asking in chapter 10 and chapter 18 how are we to enter the kingdom how are we to inherit eternal life who then can be saved it is very clear that we cannot do it ourselves and Luke tells us that there is an atonement there is a propitiatory sacrifice to be made by Jesus the Pharisee was not willing to humble himself Paul tells us in Philippians that Jesus though in the very form of God humbled himself took the form of a servant and became obedient to death upon a cross there is one who is willing to humble himself to purchase our salvation the rich young man was not willing to give away his riches and yet Paul in Corinthians tells us that we know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ who though he was rich for our sake became poor so that his poverty we might become rich all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified not by our works but by his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in

Christ Jesus whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood to be received by faith well C.T. Studd knew that he was a famous cricketer he studied at a university in England a very good university although they lost the boat race this year he was very able very wealthy young man and his father became a Christian one day and soon the rest of the family was converted and C.T. Studd decided to live wholeheartedly for Christ he read these words of the rich young man and unlike this man he gave away his wealth his fortune was I think the equivalent of 12 million pounds gave it away to Christian organizations and he left his father's home he left the country he went to China he went to India he went to Africa to preach he suffered great loss he made great sacrifice all his money of course he gave away and he had a great aphorism C.T. Studd used to say if Jesus Christ be God and died for me then no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for him

Christ gave much more than we can ever give to purchase our salvation he left much more than we can ever leave in order to bring us into his father's house he humbled himself where we are not willing to humble ourselves he impoverished himself when we are not willing to impoverish ourselves if Jesus be God and died for me then no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for him Peter left something for Jesus he gave up an awful lot for him but Jesus gave up an awful lot more for Peter as a consequence Peter's name will be written in heaven and he will be in that great multitude so as we close our studies in Luke let me just recap Luke wants us to know that we are to be people who hear and obey the word of God but at the same time to know that we cannot justify ourselves that all have fallen short but in his mercy God has given us an atonement for our sin and Luke says to us is there one thing you lack is there one thing in your life which is so important too important that is hindering you from entering the kingdom hindering your discipleship and he says if that is the case you will go away very sad your sorrows will increase but if you're willing to take that step of faith and obedience to leave whatever it is behind then you will receive much more in this age and in the age to come eternal life

Christ died to bring us to God he gave himself for us and Luke asks the question will we give anything for him let's pray together therefore since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses let us lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely and let us run with endurance the race set before us looking to Jesus the founder and perfecter of our faith who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross despising the shame and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God Father we thank you for your son our Lord Jesus Christ who went to the cross for us who humbled himself who impoverished himself that we might be exalted and we might be rich we thank you for him for his love and we ask Lord that you will show us if there is any one thing in our hearts which is keeping us from coming to him and following him help us

Lord to throw away every sin which so easily hinders and entangles and we ask that by your strength and your grace we might run the race with endurance and perseverance this week for your glory Amen Amen