

## Is “One Thing” Going to Keep You From Heaven?

According to Jesus, “one thing” certainly *can* keep you from heaven. How else are we to understand the story told in all three of the synoptic gospels regarding the rich young ruler?

The only way to get the *rich young ruler* designation for this individual from the story recounted in [Matthew 19:16-22](#); [Mark 10:17-22](#); and [Luke 18:18-23](#) is to combine the accounts of it. [Matthew 19:20,21](#) tells us he was *young*; and [Luke 18:18,23](#) tells us he was both a *ruler* and *rich*.

The story itself is simple and sad. This rich young ruler came to Jesus and asked what he could do to inherit eternal life. Please note that he asked, and was subsequently told by the Savior, what he could “**do**” to inherit eternal life. Apparently neither this young man nor Jesus subscribed of the modern denominational (and false) concept that salvation is completely divorced from works ([cf. James 2:14-26](#)).

When Jesus gave him “the basics” of obedience (under the Law of Moses, since it was still in effect until Jesus’s death, [cf. Hebrews 9:16-17](#)), he indicated compliance to these requirements had been his practice since youth. Then, knowing his heart, Jesus told him, “*One thing thou lack...*” It seems that not only was this young fellow rich, he loved and trusted in his wealth rather than God. Jesus told him what he needed, but did not want, to hear. The sad epitaph to this story is that “*at these words his face fell, and he went away grieved...*” Apparently he was unwilling to do “the one thing” he lacked to ensure “*treasure in heaven.*”

Please note the rich young ruler’s *positive advantages* (from the [Mark 10](#) account). He had **the right approach/attitude**- he came to Jesus and knelt before Him, [v.17a](#). He had **the right desire**- he wanted to inherit eternal life, [v.17b](#). He asked **the right question**- “What must I do?” [v.17c](#). He had **the right preparation**- obedience to God’s word so far as he knew it, [vv.19-20](#). He even got **the right** (probably would be better worded, “an extremely advantageous”) **emotional response from the Savior**- “*And looking at him, Jesus felt a love for him...*” [v.21a](#). He certainly also got **the right answer to his query**- he was told “the one thing” his obedience lacked, [v.21b](#). And yet, despite all of these positive advantages, “*at these words, his face fell, and he went away grieved, for he*

*was one who owned much property.*” [v.22](#). Again, he was unwilling, his previous understanding and dedication notwithstanding, to do the “**one thing**” his obedience lacked to be complete.

Do we dismiss this parable because “I’m not rich?” Perhaps. But while we likely shake our heads in lamenting derision at this young man’s reaction to Jesus’ saving words, are we being a bit hypocritical here? Consider this: Do **you** lack “**just one thing**” to be completely acceptable to and approved by God? I’m quite sure my list of lacking things is considerably longer than just one! How about yours? Are there things to which you’re still clinging that are part of the “old man of sin/flesh” that was supposed to have been crucified in your obedience to Jesus, [Romans 6:1-7](#)? Have some of the sins of your youth followed and stayed with you into adulthood? Are there some “sacred cows” of idolatry or carnal thinking and practices that you are still unwilling to surrender? Are there worldly habits to which you have clung to rather than carving them out of your life, [Colossians 3:5-11](#)? Have you withheld some part of yourself rather than whole-heartedly committing to love God “*with all your heart* (emotional commitment), *and with all your soul* (spiritual commitment), *and with all your mind* (mental commitment), *and with all your strength* (physical/resource commitment),” ([Mark 12:30](#))? I’m quite sure my list is considerably longer than one, what about yours?

But whether there are “one” or “one hundred” things you lack, there are three critical questions to consider. **Do you know what you lack?** You can’t do what you “lack” if you won’t listen to the Master’s requirements. Look deeply and honestly into the *perfect mirror* of the New Testament, [James 1:23-27](#). **What are you doing about your list of lacking things?** Waiting and hoping to *feel* or *experience* something spectacular is no substitute for doing what Christ says, [Luke 6:46-49](#). **What are you willing to do about your list?** It seems to me that perhaps this rich young ruler really expected only praise and acceptance from Jesus. His request may have been for approval rather than information. I fear far too often far too many expect Jesus to “accept me as I am” instead of being willing to “become what He wants.” Are you willing to truly become a disciple (follower) of Jesus so that you may inherit the eternal life ([Luke 14:25-35](#)), or will you too “*go away grieved*”?