

# Faming of the Shrewd

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, good morning. It's lovely to see you all. I just want to clarify that the choice of that parable has nothing to do with the fact that Archie is leaving today. Somebody being told they can't do their job anymore is completely unrelated to the event.

Please keep your Bibles open. That would be tremendously helpful. And it is a real honour to be here on such a momentous day as Katie and Archie set sail down to Peoples.

And what an exciting partnership that has been forged over the last number of years. And to now come to the point where Archie and Katie can go full time down in Peoples.

What a great thing the Lord is accomplishing amongst you here at Brunfield. Let me pray and then we'll get going with Luke chapter 16.

Gracious God, we understand the absolute vanity of studying your word independent of your spirit. So please shine the light of your word into us. That it may be alive.

[ 1 : 05 ] That we might see, understand and be changed by your truth. In Jesus name. Amen.

Charles Blondin was a world famous French tightrope walker in the middle of the 19th century.

He shot to global fame in 1859 as the first person to traverse the Niagara Gorge. In subsequent years, because he became so famous, he repeated the feat.

Elevating the danger each time. He did it blindfolded. He did it in a sack. He paused halfway across to cook an omelette.

His final crossing involved him crossing the gorge, pushing a wheelbarrow. He went the 17 minute journey to the other side.

And then he turned around and went the 17 minutes back again. And to the crowd that were gathered on the clifftop, he said, Do you think I could do it with somebody in the wheelbarrow?

[ 2 : 12 ] And they all went, of course you can. Of course you can. You are the great Blondin. At which point he looked at them and he said, who's coming? And nobody moved.

Everyone was silent. There was a great difference between knowing something about Blondin and trusting something about Blondin.

A great difference between thinking he could and staking your whole life on the fact that he could. Let me tell you that Luke chapter 16 verses 1 to 13, this enigmatic parable about the dishonest manager, from the lips of Jesus is the who is coming moment.

Who's coming? Who's going to be all in on the mission that I am accomplishing? Who is going to stake all of their life and come with me and be part of what I am doing?

For my eternal kingdom and for my glory. Who's coming? Ask Jesus in Luke chapter 16.

[ 3 : 16 ] It is a parable that speaks to us and says our decisive use of resources reveals whether our hearts align with Jesus' hearts.

We're parachuting into the second half of Luke's gospel. A second half that began in chapter 9 verse 51 when Jesus set his face to go to Jerusalem.

When the time drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. Jesus is on his way back to glory. When the time came for him to be taken up, back to where he came from, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.

The journeying with Jesus shape of the root is following Jesus to glory via suffering. That's what the whole second half of Luke's gospel is about.

What does it mean? What does it take? What will it cost to follow Jesus to glory? And that road to glory necessarily involves the suffering of Jerusalem.

[ 4 : 34 ] And let's be clear on this Palm Sunday. That was a memo that none of the disciples and none of Jesus' followers got. What? Because when he rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, everyone shouted, God save us, God save us, God save us.

But towards the end of the week, when it was clear that it was not going to be glory, but suffering, they all joined in the crowd and said, crucify him, crucify him, crucify him. And our current section on this journey began in Luke 13 verse 22.

This long journey from 951 to 1945 is split up into different bits. And the way Luke does that is by saying the way.

And every time he says the way, he's talking about something new. And the thrust of this section is when Jesus says, make every effort to enter through the narrow door.

And everything that follows is about what it takes, the effort that it needs, the cost it requires to enter through that narrow door, to follow Jesus to glory via the suffering of Jerusalem.

[ 5 : 48 ] He demonstrates that to enter through the narrow door, you need to realize your absolute need of a dead and risen Messiah.

As he looks over Jerusalem and says, long I wanted to gather you as a hen gathers her chicks, but you would not come. It's effort that's going to require great humility.

That as he has dinner with the chief Pharisee, it becomes clear that they're so puffed up with pride. It's going to be impossible for them to enter through the narrow gate, the narrow door.

It is something that will require everything that you've got to give. It will require loving Jesus so much that all of your earthly relationships will look like hate in comparison.

And in Luke 15, it is effort that will require an all-out search. No holes barred scouring of absolutely everything in order that they might be rejoicing when lost, repentant people are found and brought home.

[ 6 : 56 ] And in Luke 16, it is effort that will require shrewd investment of your time and your treasure and your talents. It will require decisive use of your resources.

And by your resources, I mean your time, your treasure and your talents. Chapter 15 is probably the most famous chapter in the Bible. The triptych of parables about the lost sheep and the lost coin and the lost son.

And the problem is because those are so famous and so obviously go together. We read them and then we stop reading. And I want to tell you that Luke chapter 16 verses 1 to 13 is directly related to these parables.

This is, if you like, the sting in the tail. This is, if you like, we've loved chapter 15. We've loved Jesus, the great one who seeks and saves what's lost.

We love Jesus who launches a no-holds-barred surge until everything that is lost is brought home. And Jesus in chapter 16 says, who's coming?

[ 8 : 06 ] He even starts the parable. Jesus also told his disciples this parable. It's absolutely connected.

Jesus says, you've seen my heart, which is about finding lost people. You've seen the depth of my forgiveness, the inexhaustible nature of my grace.

Jesus says, you've seen what makes me tick, the reason that I came. And then he also tells his disciples this parable and says, who's coming?

Who's coming? And at first reading, it is an unnerving parable, isn't it? I mean, this manager seems to be a bit scrupulous.

And yet Jesus commends him. We're supposed to be encouraging utilitarian shortcuts.

[ 9 : 06 ] We're supposed to be encouraging selfishness, where people who know that they've done wrong cut corners and cook the books and do things in order that they might have a happy and healthy retirement.

Well, I don't think so. Because Jesus says what the master commended, verse 8. The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly.

He commends him for his shrewdness. Now, Jesus commending his shrewdness is not commending his dishonesty. That's why verse 8 is so helpful.

It's like the end of a big bank heist. Where you look back and you see how everything has been done. And the leader of the investigation just applauds.

He's not commending the stealing of the money. He's not commending the cracking of the safe. But he stands back and says, that's a great plan.

[ 10 : 12 ] That's a great scheme that you've enacted. The master commends the dishonest manager for his shrewdness. For his shrewdness, not his dishonesty.

He applauds his shrewdness. His quick thinking, decisive action in the moment, knowing what the future would hold. So let's get into it.

It is a parable about shrewdness, verses 1 to 7. What is pictured here is a very, very rich man. And because he is very rich and has business enterprises and a huge property portfolio, he hires a wealth manager to look after his affairs.

He's hired a middleman. He's employed a wealth manager. Why? So he can enjoy his wealth where someone else looks after the business. The wealth manager is entrusted with the family business. All the affairs of the rich man. The property portfolio. The craft brewing industry. The stocks and shares investments. The ongoing trading relationships.

[ 11 : 24 ] The global corporate deals. A steward to manage the business empire. However, the manager is accused of wasting the master's possessions.

That word wasting is exactly the same word used of the prodigal son. Who wastes his inheritance in the foreign land. Away from his father's house.

It seems this manager is squandering the rich man's treasure. And finally, verse 2, the report gets back to the rich man.

And they send an email to the rich man with the subject line. Do you know what your wealth manager is doing? And the rich man sends an urgent email to his wealth manager.

Subject line. What is this I hear about you? Let's get an appointment in the calendar for Monday morning. Because you cannot be manager any longer.

[ 12 : 34 ] And it seems from the wealth manager's actions that he's not been doing a good job. He knows he's banged to rights.

He knows that he really has been wasting the rich man's possessions. He doesn't craft a defence. He doesn't phone his union. He makes his exit strategy.

He is guilty and therefore he knows there is nothing that he can do to continue in his current job. And his exit strategy is fuelled by shrewdness.

And we read his internal monologue. What shall I do? My master is taking away my job. On Monday, I will get a P-45, be disgraced.

Have all of my possessions from my office put in a box and I'll be marched out by security. What am I going to do? I'm not strong enough to dig.

[ 13 : 38 ] And I'm too ashamed to beg. And then he hits upon it. Bingo. I know what I'll do. So when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses.

I've got no future here, but can I use my last remaining hours while I've got security clearance to mean that when I leave employment here, it will go very, very well for me.

I know what I'll do. I'll take decisive action with the little time that I have in order that when I leave, people will welcome me into their houses.

Knowing the future, thrust him towards decisive and drastic action in the present. He knows he's going to get the chop.

His reputation will be tarnished. No one will employ him as a wealth manager. Therefore, in a desperate attempt to make friends and influence people, he calls in the rich man's debtors and he slashes their outstanding balance.

[ 14 : 51 ] He calls in all his master's debtors and we're given a case study of two examples of what he did. The first debtor owes 3,000 liters of olive oil.

Now, the cheapest oil I could find this week on Amazon.com was 5 liters for 50 pounds. This man owes roughly 32 grand to the rich man.

And the manager says, quickly, get your eraser, rub it out. Right, 16,000. I mean, you'd be delighted to be that debtor. 32,000, you're thinking about some sort of repayment plan over the next 10 years. And suddenly you think, I could just swap a few credit notes around and I could maybe pay it off in a one-er. The second owes 30 tons of wheat. Today, wheat is cheaper given industrial farming, but even today, one tonne of bake-ready wheat is worth 649 pounds per tonne.

It's still quite a lot. And the manager says, quickly, make it 24 tons. Reduce the bill by a fifth. Now, the parable is written in such a way that this rich man has been so far away from the business that he has no idea what's in the orders book.

[ 16 : 19 ] So whatever the wealth manager leaves is the state of the business when he hands it back. And so there's no way that the rich man can work out who owes what to whom.

He just has to go on the dishonest manager's words. And so the manager, knowing that the writing was on the wall, he knew that his future was bleak.

He knew what would happen on Monday. And he took decisive action in order that when he left the employment, he'd be welcomed into people's houses. He could, if you like, become a professional sofa surfer.

That all these debtors now owed him a favor. There wouldn't be one family dinner he couldn't arrive at uninvited. Because he saved these people literally thousands of pounds they owe him.

And so whilst he cannot continue to be employed for the remainder of his earthly life, it is going to go very well for him. Because he's made friends and influenced just the right people.

[ 17 : 25 ] He would be looked after by all the traders for whom he has done a solid in reducing their debts. Now quite apart from taking the eraser to the debt sheet, cooking the books, cancelling debts that weren't owed to you but to the rich man, unscrupulous, but very shrewd.

Knowing the future, he took decisive action in the present. And this is what Jesus picks up in verse 8. The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly.

For his shrewdness, for his shrewdness, not his dishonesty, the manager holds his hands up and says, well played. Well played to his former wealth manager.

Looking at the ledger, he can see that it's been doctored but he has no idea what was there originally. Therefore, he has no way of collecting all the debt that was outstanding.

Knowing the day of reckoning from the master was coming, the wealth manager acted shrewdly. He invested the little time that he had left to carve out a future for himself.

[ 18 : 51 ] Then Jesus says, middle of verse 8, the people of this world are more shrewd dealing with their own kind than the people of light.

Jesus looks at this man and saw how he acted so decisively and so drastically knowing what the future looked like. looked at his disciples in front of him and said, how much more should it be with you?

You now know what the future holds. I've been telling you all the way as we've been on this journey to Jerusalem, the Son of Man will be betrayed, disowned, killed, raised, ascended, building, building an eternal kingdom that cannot be shaken.

You know what the future holds. If the dishonest manager did it for the remaining years of his three score years and ten, how much more should you in the time that you have and the talents that you have and the treasure that you have be investing in that future that has been secured so decisively by the Lord Jesus?

Just in case we didn't get it, verse 9, I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves so that when it is gone you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.

[ 20 : 19 ] It's hidden in the English, but the first you of verse 9 is singular and the second you of verse 9 is plural. I tell you, individual Christian, individual member of the family of Jesus Christ, individual citizen of Jesus' eternal kingdom, I tell you, singular, use your singular wealth to gain friends for yourselves so that when it is gone you, plural, you and all of your friends, you and all of the people that you've influenced for the gospel, you, all the people that you've used your investment of time and treasure and talents to come to saving faith in the Lord Jesus that you all will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.

The wealth manager took decisive action to be welcomed into temporal dwellings and acted so shrewdly. You use your earthly time, treasure and talents deploying it strategically and sacrificially in order that you, you and all of your friends that you've gained through your deployment of worldly wealth will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.

I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves so that when it is gone and gone it will be, if there's one thing we're learning from the Trump presidency is that worldly wealth is not secure.

People having hundreds of thousands of pounds knocked off their savings through one press conference. Gone it will be.

And the question is, how will you invest it now for eternal dwellings then? Use worldly wealth. Use your bank account gifts and your diary and the gifts that God has given you to gain friends for yourselves so that when it's all gone and you're looking at the ground from the brown side, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.

[ 23 : 00 ] In other words, use your treasure to show that your treasure isn't your treasure but Jesus is your treasure. Use your treasure to show that your treasure isn't your treasure but Jesus is your

treasure.

And investing what you have and who you are and the time that you have in what he's doing is by far the best investment you can ever make. Jesus says, my mission is seeking and saving lost people and bringing them home to be with me, to rejoice with me forever.

and he says to all of his disciples who's coming? Who's in? Who's going to stake it all? Who's going to invest in me and what I'm doing which is the surest investment you could ever make?

Jesus then finishes by offering four principles to help us be shrewd. The first one is this, verse 10. Are you faithful in the little bit you have now?

Look at what it says. Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much.

[ 24 : 16 ] We're all at that stage, aren't we? We don't quite have enough and we tell ourselves the lie, when I have a little bit more then I'll be more invested in what Jesus is doing. And it's a total lie because habits are easily grooved.

And therefore, if we're not sacrificially investing in Jesus with the little bit we have now, then even when we have a lot we won't be investing. If you're dishonest in the little bit you have now, you'll still be dishonest even if the windfall comes.

And so are you faithful in the little bit you have now? There might be a lot, not a lot of fat on the bone. But if you sacrificially invest in that, that will be the best investment that you ever make.

And who knows if you're faithful in the very little bit you have now. When you get more you'll still be being faithful in what the Lord has trusted you with. This is so shocking, verse 11.

So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches?

Do you see, Jesus is making a massive distinction there between worldly wealth, between stuff, between bank balances and gold ingots and yachts and cigars and vintage wine collections.

[ 25 : 43 ] And he just calls that worldly wealth just stuff. And he says if you haven't been faithful in the stuff, who will trust you with true riches, eternal riches, heavenly treasure, treasure that will yield a dividend every year for all of eternity, which is a very, very long time.

that's a very, very long time. Are you trustworthy with worthless wealth? Worldly wealth?

Wealth that in the light of eternity will be like monopoly money? Because if you're trustworthy in worthless wealth, then the promise is here that God will trust you with true riches that will last forever.

number three, verse 12. And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own? Do you realize that your stuff isn't actually your stuff?

Do you know that constant refrain in the Psalms, the earth is the Lord's and everything in it? He's just given it to you to borrow. In a sense, he's employed you as a wealth manager to take what he's given you to invest in his kingdom in order that it might yield more in order that you might have more to invest in what King Jesus is doing.

[ 27 : 15 ] And the minute we realize that our stuff isn't our stuff, but we're borrowing it to invest in, to invest for a very rich God who owns everything, suddenly we won't hold it so tight.

We won't cleave to it and cling to it. suddenly because we know it's not ours but it's been gifted to us by our Heavenly Father, suddenly we'll be really ready to really invest in what Jesus is doing. It's much easier, isn't it, taking risks with other people's money? And that's true of all of your money. It's not yours.

It belongs to God. If you've not been trustworthy with someone else's property, God's property, what he's given you, he will trust you with stuff of your own in eternity.

And fourthly, which master are you really serving? Because Jesus says it's binary, no one can serve two masters. we all think that we're the exception to the rule, that we can be all in for Jesus and yet also have a slice of the world for ourselves.

[ 28 : 40 ] We do not need to forfeit our souls when we gain the world. We all think that we're the exception to that rule and Jesus says you absolutely can't. It's one or the other.

is it Jesus all for Jesus, all I am and have and ever hope to be? Or is it worldliness, rainy day funds, gaining a slice of the world, trying to have our cake and eat it?

Jesus says you aren't the exception. You can serve one or the other. Jesus or money, investing in an eternal kingdom that cannot be shaken or putting a few shekels in a way in a bank that will ultimately fail you and be proven worthless.

Therefore, be shrewdly investing your earthly life to gain an eternal dividend surrounded by all the friends you've gained through your shrewd investment in this life. It's a pertinent message for today, I think, because one of my lasting memories of Brunnsfield is that it is full of very committed unsacrificial people.

And I guess today is testimony to that fact. All your investment in Archie and Katie over the last number of years and now sending them out to Peebles, taking your investment and deploying it strategically in Peebles that you might have a share in all that the Lord accomplishes down there in the borders.

[ 30 : 16 ] But let me tell you, it would be a real shame if this was the high point of your shrewd investing. If it was this and then paring back.

If it was this and then coasting. If it was this and just making pews more comfortable for you to sit in. That's not the worst idea. Sending them out to Peebles should be really encourage you to redouble your efforts to double down on your investment in all that Jesus is doing.

It'd be a shame having lived so much by faith you resorted to starting to live by sight. And having invested so much in people for the glory of the Lord Jesus you now started investing in stuff for your own comfort.

Friends, it is us. It is now. And it is going to require sacrificial shrewdness from all of Jesus' people in order that we might gain friends, in order that more of Scotland might be welcomed into eternal dwellings.

Our decisive use of resources reveals whether our hearts are aligned with Jesus' heart. So in closing, as we respond, could I invite you to take your mobile phone out?

[ 31 : 48 ] Just log into your banking app and pass it to the person next to you for a bit of accountability in how you're investing your money? Well, of course we're not going to do that.

But it would be quite revealing, wouldn't it? As to where we're spending our time and our treasure and our talents. Once we'd finished analysing the banking app, if we got to people's calendars and diary, see where their investments were really being made.

Because I guess at the end of the day, according to Luke 16, where we're investing is the barometer that reveals whether our desires are actually aligned to Jesus, or this is just a veneer that we're putting out to save face.

Jesus is the ultimate one who acted so shrewdly in order that we might have eternal life. Who literally invested everything for you and for me.

And therefore it would be so foolish and so ungrateful if we started to hold back some of the things that he's given to us to invest in what he's doing. Let's pray together.

[ 33 : 02 ] Father God, we come before you in awe of who you are.

The one who is holy and sovereign and full of steadfast love. You are worthy of all of our praise. The one who draws near to us in mercy through Jesus.

He gave everything for each of us. us. Thank you for the cross. Thank you for his precious blood poured out. For his eternal victory.

Thank you so much for Jesus, the one who held nothing back but invested his all. And invested his all so that we could gain everything in him. Forgive us, Lord, for the ways that we hold back, our time, we pursue our comforts, we selfishly deploy our resources, we become self-sufficient and selfish in our hearts.

Too often we invest in what fades rather than what lasts. Change us, God, we ask. Shape us into bold, sacrificial and shrewd investors.

[ 34 : 18 ] Invest us in your eternal kingdom. Help us live with eternity in mind, fully surrendered, joyfully obedient, and all in your glory. glory. And we're here this morning pleading that you would have mercy in Scotland so that on the day that we see Jesus, we, surrounded by many friends, would be welcomed into eternal dwellings.

We're so thankful that Jesus came to seek and to save that which was lost, and we pray that we would be fully on board with him. And it's in his name we pray. Amen.

Amen.