



**THE WISDOM OF
BABYLON
AND THE WAYS OF HEAVEN**

**WHY DID JESUS CHRIST SAY IT IS
EASIER FOR A CAMEL TO GO THROUGH
THE EYE OF A NEEDLE THAN FOR A
RICH MAN TO ENTER THE KINGDOM OF
GOD? MATTHEW 19:24**

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The Wisdom of Babylon and the Ways of Heaven

By Isaiah-Phillips Akintola

Why It Is Difficult for a Rich Man to Enter the Kingdom of Heaven

Matthew 19:24 contains one of the most misread statements Jesus ever made. Most people hear it as a warning about attachment to money, that the rich man simply loves his wealth too much to let it go. But that reading barely scratches the surface of what Jesus was actually saying. When he declared that it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God, he was not primarily addressing the quantity of what the rich man holds. He was addressing the quality of the system that produced it.

"Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." (Matthew 19:24)

To become wealthy in the world's system, a person must fully learn and fully practice the values, principles, and methodology of that system. Babylon does not reward half-hearted participants. It rewards those who have internalized its logic completely — who know how to read environments, how to position themselves, how to compete, how to negotiate, and how to press for advantage in spaces designed to exclude them. The wealth seems so real. But it is the fruit of a tree whose roots run through a value system that is fundamentally at odds with the kingdom of God. That is what Jesus was identifying. The wealth itself is not the obstacle. The architecture of thinking that generated the wealth is the obstacle.

Consider the person who came from nothing. Who grew up poor, who perhaps faced the additional barrier of race, nationality, or social identity that the system told them disqualified them from certain rooms. Who refused to accept that verdict. Who taught themselves the rules of those rooms, pushed through doors that were designed to stay closed, and built something real out of circumstances that were designed to produce failure.

That person did not succeed by accident. They succeeded because they became extraordinarily skilled at operating within the Babylonian structure order; they've perfected the art of learning its unwritten codes, mastering its currencies of power and perception, absorbing its philosophy of what it takes to win. What Jesus is saying to that person is this: everything you learned in order to get here is now the very thing standing between you and the kingdom of heaven.

Not because your effort was wrong. Not because your resilience was sin. But because the system that trained you trained you for a different kingdom, with different laws, a different system of economy, and a different definition of what it means to prosper and succeed.

The camel is unable to pass through the eye of the needle because of its considerable size and the heavy burdens it carries. This animal, loaded with goods and baggage accumulated along its journey, becomes too weighty to fit through such a narrow opening. The eye of the needle itself represents a passage so constricted that, traditionally, traders were required to remove their cargo. This served not only as a practical necessity but also as a security measure, ensuring that those entering a town were not smuggling contraband or illegal weapons that could threaten governance or order.

Jesus chose this analogy to illustrate the principle and value system associated with entering the kingdom of God. This is particularly relevant for individuals who have acquired wealth through systems and practices that do not align with heavenly principles. The rich man faces difficulty entering the kingdom precisely because the mindset and framework that enabled his success are too expansive, too entrenched, and too deeply validated by experience to be easily relinquished. The transformation required is not merely an external shedding of possessions but an internal release of the entire operating system that has defined his pursuit and achievement.

"And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, 'You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.' Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions." (Mark 10:21-22)

The young ruler in that account was not necessarily a wicked person but one who lacked the knowledge and ways of true wealth, even though he was highly religious. He had kept the laws and commandments from his youth. He was morally good, religious, and sincere but spiritually blind. The moment Our Lord Jesus put his finger on the specific thing that he needed to go, the man could not do it. His possessions had him more than he had them. And the possessions are only the visible layer. Beneath them was the entire framework of thinking, striving, achieving, and securing that had become his operating system. Jesus was not asking him to become poor. He was asking him to become free — to release his grip on a system of producing life that was ultimately insufficient, in order to receive a system that was not.

This is where the real confrontation happens. When a person has genuinely succeeded by the world's principles and standards; when the principles they applied actually worked, when the hustle produced the house and the business and the seat at the table, the true kingdom gospel's demand to release that framework feels like an insult to their intelligence. Not necessarily because they are arrogant, but because the ideology and framework were tested and it proved itself, particularly when they show the fruit of their labour. You cannot easily talk someone out of a methodology that demonstrably worked. You cannot ask them to exchange a proven system for a kingdom they cannot see, governed by principles that seem to contradict everything their experience has taught them, without expecting serious resistance.

And yet that is exactly what Christ asks. Not because the world's system is entirely without wisdom, but because it has a ceiling. Babylon does not tell its students about the ceiling. It sells them the promise of unlimited ascent. But there is a threshold beyond which the fruit of that tree no longer nourishes. There is a point at which the wealth accumulated cannot fill the interior emptiness that was there before the first dollar was made. There is a moment when everything the world's system promised to deliver has been delivered, and the person sitting inside the achievement realizes they are still not at rest. That is the moment God has been working toward. Not to humiliate what was built, but to reveal what it was always missing.

"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal." (Matthew 6:19-20)

God's prosperity does not begin with external accumulation. It begins from within. It is the kind of wealth that remains intact when the market collapses, when the business fails, when the platform disappears. It is the peace that does not depend on circumstances, the identity that does not depend on achievement, the security that does not depend on net worth. The world's system cannot produce this. It can produce many things, but not this. And a person who has spent years mastering the world's system must go through the genuine and costly process of unlearning that system before they can receive what heaven offers in its place.

What Babylon Teaches You

There is a wisdom that the world produces. It is not false in every respect — that is precisely what makes it so dangerous. It works, at least in the short term. It gets results. It keeps you alive, keeps you fed, keeps you in the room with people who have power. Over time, if you practice it long enough, it becomes the only framework through which you know how to interpret reality and navigate life. It becomes your instinct. You stop thinking about it and start living from it automatically. Babylon has successfully disciplined you.

Babylon in scripture is not merely a historical city. It is a system — a comprehensive way of organizing human life around human wisdom, human ambition, and human power. It is the system that tells you your survival depends on your ability to read the room, manage perception, leverage relationships, and never show weakness. It rewards the shrewd. It advances those who know how to play the game. And it punishes, or simply discards, those who do not.

Most people who have lived any significant portion of their life outside the covering of God's kingdom have been shaped by some version of Babylon. It does not always look like corruption. Sometimes it looks like intelligence, like resilience, like the hard-earned wisdom of someone who learned how to survive in environments where the stakes were real and the margins were thin. You were not weak. You were not foolish. You learned to survive. The problem is what surviving in Babylon teaches your soul about how the world works and what you must become to make it through.

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths." (Proverbs 3:5-6)

The instruction not to lean on your own understanding is not a call to ignorance. It is a call to a fundamental reorientation of where you locate your confidence. Babylonian wisdom teaches you to lean hard on your own understanding — to calculate, to strategize, to rely on what you have seen and experienced and learned through the school of hard knocks. That understanding is real. But it is not sufficient, and in the kingdom of God it is not foundational. God is asking for something most survivors find profoundly difficult to give: the subordination of everything they learned the hard way to a wisdom that comes from a source they cannot see and a process they cannot fully control.

The Problem with Survival Intelligence

Survival intelligence is one of the most powerful forces in human experience. When a person has been shaped by scarcity, by threat, by environments where trust was repeatedly betrayed, the psyche builds a set of protective structures designed to prevent the same pain from happening again. These structures are not sin in their origin — they are the soul's response to real danger. But they calcify over time. What began as protection becomes prison. The walls that kept harm out also keep transformation out.

The person who learned early that vulnerability gets you hurt will find it almost impossible to bring themselves to the altar of submission to God, because submission requires vulnerability of the most complete kind. You are not just opening yourself to another person. You are opening yourself to an invisible God, through a process you did not design, at a pace you cannot manage, toward outcomes you cannot guarantee. Every instinct shaped by Babylon will rise up against this. The survival intelligence will say: this is how people get taken advantage of. This is how you end up at the mercy of something you cannot control. Do not do it.

This is why so many people can be intellectually convinced of the gospel and remain practically unchanged. They know what is right. The mind has accepted the argument. But the deeper architecture of the soul — the structures built through years of learning to navigate a world where God's ways do not seem to work — remains intact and operational. Knowing what is right and being able to live from what is right are two entirely different things. The gap between them is not a gap of information. It is a gap of formation.

"For the wisdom of this world is folly with God. For it is written, 'He catches the wise in their craftiness.'" (1 Corinthians 3:19)

The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil

The original rupture in the human story was not a turn toward evil in the obvious sense. Adam and Eve did not eat from the tree because they wanted to become wicked. They ate because they wanted to be like God — to have knowledge, to have the capacity to determine for themselves what is good and what is evil, to be self-sufficient in their navigation of reality. The serpent's offer was not an invitation to chaos. It was an invitation to autonomy. And autonomy, wrapped in the language of wisdom and elevation, is one of the most seductive things the fallen nature reaches for.

The fruit of that tree was not poison in the crude sense. It produced something. It gave them a form of knowledge they did not have before. But it came at the cost of their dependence on God, and dependence on God was never meant to be a limitation — it was the very condition of their flourishing. They traded life sustained by communion with God for life managed by their own expanded but now fallen capacity to discern. That trade has been re-enacted by every human being born since.

When a person has been living from the fruit of that tree long enough, they develop genuine competence. They can tell good from evil by their own reckoning. They can build systems, navigate complexity, produce outcomes. Much of what human civilization has achieved comes from this capacity. But it is a capacity exercised in independence from God, and independence from God always produces the same long-term result: a life that looks capable on the outside while remaining progressively emptied on the inside, because the soul was designed for communion, not for autonomy.

"There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death." (Proverbs 14:12)

The path of Babylonian wisdom can seem entirely reasonable at every step. Each decision looks justified in context. Each compromise looks necessary given the circumstances. The person following it is not always acting in bad faith — they are acting from the most reliable map they have, which is their own understanding refined by experience. The problem is that the map was drawn in exile. It was drawn in a land that is

not their origin and not their destination, by a mind shaped by that land's logic rather than by the logic of the kingdom they were made for.

The Difficulty of Unlearning

This is where the profound difficulty of genuine discipleship reveals itself. To follow God in the way the kingdom actually requires is not simply to add new beliefs to an existing structure. It is to dismantle the existing structure and rebuild from a different foundation. Jesus described it as dying. Paul described it as putting off the old man. Neither of them was speaking metaphorically in the casual sense. They were describing an actual death, the death of the self-constructed through years of living by the wisdom of Babylon, and an actual resurrection into a self-constructed through submission to the wisdom of heaven.

Unlearning is harder than learning. Learning adds to what you already have. Unlearning requires you to surrender what you built, what you earned, what you suffered to acquire. The person who clawed their way out of poverty by mastering the economics of the world will find it genuinely costly to submit their financial life to the principles of the kingdom. Not because those principles are inferior — they are vastly superior — but because trusting them requires releasing the grip of a system that, whatever its costs, at least worked in a way you understood and could predict.

This is also why so many seasoned, intelligent, and experienced people struggle more with full surrender than younger or less experienced believers sometimes do. It is not that wisdom and experience are enemies of faith. It is that accumulated survival wisdom creates thick layers of self-sufficiency that take time and grace to soften. The person who has seen a great deal and survived a great deal has more to release. The very depth of their formation in Babylon is the measure of how thoroughgoing the transformation needs to be.

"I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." (Galatians 2:20)

What Heaven's Wisdom Requires

The wisdom that comes from above operates by entirely different principles than the wisdom of Babylon. James describes it as pure, peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. Every one of those qualities runs counter to the default instincts Babylon develops. Babylon produces wisdom that is strategic, guarded, self-protective, and calculating, willing to compromise on mercy when mercy gets in the way of advantage.

The wisdom of heaven requires you to be open when Babylon says stay closed. It requires you to be gentle when Babylon says project strength. It requires you to trust a process you did not design when Babylon says the one who controls the process controls the outcome.

"But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere." (James 3:17)

The values, ways, principles, standards, and processes of heaven are not complicated to understand intellectually. Most believers can articulate them without difficulty. The challenge is that living from them requires a continuous, active death to the alternative framework Babylon installed. It is not a one-time transaction. Every new sphere of life, every new season of pressure, every new threat to security or identity will surface another layer of the Babylonian architecture and present the same choice again: will you navigate this from the wisdom of Babylon or from the wisdom of heaven?

God does not rush this process, but he is relentless in it. He will allow the wisdom of Babylon to fail in the places where it cannot ultimately succeed. He will create situations that Babylonian intelligence cannot solve — not to humiliate the person, but to create the space where the wisdom from above can be reached for and received. Every such moment is an invitation. The degree to which a person has honestly reckoned with the limits of what Babylon taught them is the degree to which they can receive what heaven offers in its place.

The Death That Leads to Life

Jesus was direct about the terms. To follow him means to deny yourself, take up a cross, and follow. The cross is not a symbol of difficulty in the generic sense. It is the specific instrument of death to the self-constructed outside of God. You cannot carry a cross casually. You cannot negotiate the weight of it. You pick it up with the full knowledge of what it is and where it leads, and you follow anyway, because you have come to understand, not just believe, but understand at the level where decisions are actually made that the life waiting on the other side of that death is worth everything the death costs.

"For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." (Matthew 16:25)

The person who has truly died to the wisdom of Babylon does not become passive or naive. They become something far more powerful: a person whose intelligence, experience, and capacity are now fully submitted to and directed by the Spirit of God. Everything they learned, everything they built, everything they survived becomes raw

material in the hands of God rather than a competing framework against him. The wisdom they now carry is not less sophisticated than what Babylon offered. It is more sophisticated, because it is grounded in a reality Babylon cannot access and moving toward outcomes Babylon cannot produce.

This is the life that pleases God in all aspects, not a life emptied of competence and character, but a life in which competence and character have been crucified and raised again under new ownership. The mind is still sharp, but it now thinks from the mind of Christ. The will is still strong, but it now bends in the direction of the Father's purposes. The experience is still real, but it is now interpreted through the lens of the Spirit rather than the logic of survival. That is the promise waiting on the other side of the unlearning. And it is worth every difficult step of the process to get there.

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