

# Wings

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*“Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;  
they shall mount up with wings like eagles.”  
Isaiah 40:31*



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## Jesus Loves Pharisees, Too

The Pharisees were among Jesus' most bitter enemies. Yet He loved them just as He loves all of us. In dealing with modern Pharisees, we must remember that example.

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! . . . O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!” (Matt. 23:13, 37).

The verbal spanking that Jesus administered on the Pharisees in Matthew 23 contains some of the harshest language Jesus ever uttered. And for good reason. The Pharisees embodied all that was wrong with the Judaism of His day. In their zeal to honor God, the Pharisees had twisted His law into a jungle of oppressive regulations. Their self-righteous, hypocritical form of spirituality has become an ageless symbol of what can happen when religion runs amok.

Nevertheless, for all their faults, the Pharisees received a great deal of personal attention from Jesus during His ministry. The Pharisees had a curiosity about the Galilean, and on several occasions invited Jesus into their homes for meals. Jesus always accepted those invi-

tations, using them as teaching opportunities (Lk. 7:36-50; 11:37-54; 14:1-24). At least one Pharisee, Nicodemus, was so impressed with Jesus that he sought Him out for a personal counseling session (Jn. 3:1-21). Nicodemus remained a secret disciple of Jesus until the end, assisting in His burial following His crucifixion (Jn. 19:38-42).

Most of the Pharisees were implacable enemies of Jesus, but true to His own teaching, Jesus loved them anyway. We remember the harsh denunciations of Matthew 23, but we forget that His rebuke ended with a tender plea to embrace them “as a hen gathers her chicks.” That love reached its ultimate expression in the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, the most ardent Pharisee of his day (Phil. 3:5-6). Until the day he died, Paul marveled at the grace of the One who “loved me, and gave Himself for me” (Gal. 2:20). Jesus loved His enemy, and His enemy melted.

If the villains of the Bible serve as a warning to later generations not to repeat their mistakes, surely the Pharisees must rank high on that list.

Even today, the greatest damage to the cause of Christ is inflicted not by His enemies, but by some of the very people who claim to be His disciples. Their condescending arrogance and self-serving hypocrisy sow discord among brethren and drive people away from the Lord. The specific doctrines may be different, but the spirit of Phariseeism remains a very real threat today, and we must oppose it.

But therein lies a second, more sinister, danger. While we must actively oppose the spirit and behavior of the Pharisees when it arises among us, we must take care not to allow that opposition to descend into contempt and hatred. If Jesus loved the Pharisees of His day, despite all the terrible things they did to Him, we must love the Pharisees among us today. Showing that love won't be easy; it certainly doesn't come naturally. But we never know if the recipient of that love might be another Saul of Tarsus, a confirmed Pharisee with a good heart who can become a tireless ambassador for the grace of God.

– David King