



The King's Ransom

Matthew 20:28

Text

Matthew 23:1-39

Topic

Jesus decries the hypocrisy of the Pharisees by pronouncing a series of "Woes!" against them

Title

"God Only Woes What I'd Be Without Him"

Introduction

Arman Molla was diagnosed with bone cancer when he was just 15.

When *Make-A-Wish* contacted Arman, he asked for something no one had ever wished before. Arman decided that what he really wanted more than anything wasn't to parachute out of a plane. He didn't want a Disney cruise or to meet his favorite movie star.

He wanted a mentor. Somebody to take him under his wing and show him how the business world works.

1 of 17

Matthew 23:1-39

"God Only Woes What I'd Be Without Him"

The people at *Make-A-Wish* were accustomed to making big things happen. They offered to get Arman a meeting with Warren Buffett or Bill Gates.

Then Arman threw them for another loop. He said no thanks. He wanted someone whom he could really get to know.

Touched by the request, one of the board members who works in finance decided to take Arman on personally, and they have developed a close mentoring relationship.

The thing that attracted me to this story was the familiar phrase, "take him under his wing." We use it mostly to describe taking an interest in someone to instruct and train them.

It's borrowed, obviously, from the world of birds, who quite literally take their young under their wings for protection from things like the sun, and the weather, and predators.

It is a favorite illustration, in the Bible, of God's overall care for His people. Here are just a few of the many wing references:

Psa 17:8 ... Hide me under the shadow of Your wings,

Psa 36:7 How precious is Your lovingkindness, O God! Therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Your wings.

Psa 57:1 Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me! For my soul trusts in You; And in the shadow of Your wings I will make my refuge, Until these calamities have passed by.

Psa 61:4 ... I will trust in the shelter of Your wings.

Psa 63:7 Because You have been my help, Therefore in the shadow of Your wings I will rejoice.

Psa 91:4 He shall cover you with His feathers, And under His wings you shall take refuge...

Jesus says to the Jews of Jerusalem, "how often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks **under her wings**, but you were not willing!" (v37).

One reason the people were "not willing" is given in the verses that precede Jesus' lament over the people and city He loved. Their religious leaders, the scribes and Pharisees, discouraged the Jews from following Jesus.

Jesus describes their leadership as blind, burdensome, and hypocritical. As mentors, they took Jews "under their wings," so to speak, but once under there, their followers were stifled and smothered rather than nurtured and protected.

Jesus' disciples were going to go into the world making disciples. They would be taking people "under **their** wings."

What would it be like under their wings? What should it be like? That is what we can discover in chapter twenty-three.

I'll organize my thoughts around two questions: #1 What Is It Like For People Who Are Taken Under Your Wings?, and #2 What Is It Like For People Who Refuse To Be Taken Under Jesus' Wings?

#1 What Is It Like For People Taken Under Your Wings?

(v1-33)

What the world calls "mentoring," we call *discipling*. Whether we are talking about a formal, structured program, like Operation Timothy; or a casual relationship between a mature believer and a younger one, it's discipling.

Since the Great Commission, to "go and make disciples," applies to every Christian, at some point or another someone, or some group of believers, is going to be under **your** wings.

Make sure your wings are spiritually preened. And by that, I mean, let's learn what *not* to be like from the negative example of the Pharisees.

Mat 23:1 Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples,

Mat 23:2 saying: "The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat.

Mat 23:3 Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do.

Scribes had knowledge of the law and could draft legal documents. Every village had at least one scribe. Most scribes were Pharisees, but not all Pharisees were scribes.

It's good to be reminded that the Pharisees started well. They were the spiritual guys who wanted to keep separated from the world. They were religious conservatives, Jewish patriots, and (as we will see) evangelical. Sounds like us!

Furthermore, they "[sat] in Moses' seat," meaning they were the ones who believed in the authority and inerrancy of the Bible.

Sounds more like us! But there are things about them we do not want to resemble.

Jesus went so far as to tell His disciples "whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do." Insofar as they rightly divided the Word of God, you should be ready to submit and obey.

The problem: "they say, and do not do." The remaining verses about the Pharisees tell you what Jesus meant.

Mat 23:4 For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers.

I see this as referring to what we would call legalism. They held to a strict interpretation of the letter of God's law, while ignoring the spirit of the law. Thus they could drag a woman caught in adultery to Jesus, throw her down before Him, and demand she be stoned - all as a test for The Lord, not caring a whit for the woman's eternal soul. And all the while themselves filled with secret sins of the heart far more heinous than hers.

There must be compassion under our wings, and an understanding of the spirit of the law as we seek to lift folks up, not keep them down.

Mat 23:5 But all their works they do to be seen by men...

Jesus knew their motives, and it was to be seen by men, to receive the praise of men, to be thought great by men.

We should not judge motives, but we can look at behavior to see if a person is calling attention to himself or herself rather than to Jesus.

Mat 23:5 ... They make their phylacteries broad and enlarge the borders of their garments.

In Deuteronomy 6:8, describing the words of God, the Jews were told "you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes."

What do you think that means? It is figurative language. It means that God's Word should direct your actions, and it should filter everything you take in.

The Pharisees took it literally and wore leather prayer boxes, with Scripture verses in them, tied on their foreheads and forearms. These were called *phylacteries*.

The Pharisees had phylacteries made that got bigger and bigger over time, as an outward show of their righteousness.

As far as the "borders of their garments," they were to be sewn on simply to set them apart from nonbelievers. The Pharisees tried to outdo one another as to the length of their borders - again, attracting attention to themselves.

Mat 23:6 They love the best places at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues,

Mat 23:7 greetings in the marketplaces, and to be called by men, 'Rabbi, Rabbi.'

Mat 23:8 But you, do not be called 'Rabbi'; for One is your Teacher, the Christ, and you are all brethren.

Mat 23:9 Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven.

Mat 23:10 And do not be called teachers; for One is your Teacher, the Christ.

Later in the New Testament, we see certain gifts and gifted men in the church who have titles like pastor, or elder, or teacher. There's nothing wrong with that as a designation.

The problem is when men seek titles, and authority, that God has not given them, and then demand to be followed.

Under our wings, folks should know that the singular authority in their lives is Jesus. To the extent He delegates authority to gifted men, and they are godly and follow the Scriptures, they are to be respected. But we are never to lord over others. We are to point them away from us and to Jesus Christ.

Here is how we do just that:

Mat 23:11 But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant.

Mat 23:12 And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.

A servant must, at some point, serve. I've known a lot of guys and gals over the years who, because they think they are gifted leaders and teachers, will only 'serve' if they can lead and teach. Hand them a broom, or a toilet plunger, and they set it down, or go looking for someone less gifted who can accomplish such a menial task.

You find true spiritual greatness when you find a servant who is content to point you to Jesus.

Jesus next launched into a series of eight "Woes!" The Lord was expressing sorrow for them, and for what they were doing to drive men away from God.

Mat 23:13 "But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in.

John the Baptist had called for repentance, announcing that the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand. He pointed to Jesus as the rightful King.

Jesus went about, for three and one-half years, offering to establish the Kingdom on the earth.

The Pharisees refused to repent; they rejected Jesus; and they did everything in their power to actively discourage the Jews from following The Lord.

Do **we** ever "shut up the kingdom of Heaven against men?" I think we can if we start to add things to the salvation formula of 'by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ.' When we demand folks keep the Sabbath, or be baptized, or speak in tongues, in order to be saved, we shut up the Kingdom to them.

Some of you have been under wings like those and you can testify how stifling it was.

Mat 23:14 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. Therefore you will receive greater condemnation.

The Pharisees depended on their disciples to support their ministries. This verse describes them as seeming to be pious while, in fact, they were taking advantage of widows by coercing them into giving them money.

Let us be extra cautious, therefore, to never coerce those under our wings into supporting the work of God.

Mat 23:15 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.

A proselyte was either a Gentile who totally converted to Judaism, or a resident alien who agreed to follow the seven laws of Noah.

Apparently the Pharisees were zealous in promoting their brand of self-righteousness. Today we'd compare the Mormon's or the JW's who go door-to-door to win converts, making them "twice as much [sons] of Hell," in that they are promoting a false salvation whose final destination is Hell.

Mat 23:16 "Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'Whoever swears by the temple, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple, he is obliged to perform it.'

Mat 23:17 Fools and blind! For which is greater, the gold or the temple that sanctifies the gold?

Mat 23:18 And, 'Whoever swears by the altar, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gift that is on it, he is obliged to perform it.'

Mat 23:19 Fools and blind! For which is greater, the gift or the altar that sanctifies the gift?

Mat 23:20 Therefore he who swears by the altar, swears by it and by all things on it.

Mat 23:21 He who swears by the temple, swears by it and by Him who dwells in it.

Mat 23:22 And he who swears by heaven, swears by the throne of God and by Him who sits on it.

The Pharisees would swear oaths in order to make them seem spiritual. They made fine lines of distinction that could invalidate their oaths.

In other words, they kept their fingers crossed, and hidden behind their backs.

We ought to be honest and open with those under our wings, with no need for oaths, and certainly without being deceptive in any way.

Mat 23:23 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone.

Tithing was a huge deal to these guys. They made you weigh out herbs from your herb garden, and give God 10% of "mint and anise and cummin."

While God required the tithe, it was no substitute for the spirit of the law - things like "justice and mercy and faith."

Do you give to the work of God? You should. How much, that's up to you, but 10% is a good place to start.

If you give, or if you 'give' of your time serving, it's no substitute for "the weightier matters of the law." You need to be listening to God, and be ready to show His character all the time.

In other words, under your wings you must demonstrate that you, and everything you have, are God's, 100% of the time, to use as He directs you.

Mat 23:24 Blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!

They literally strained their drinks, so as to not swallow an insect that would be considered unclean by the law. But by neglecting the spirit of the law, they were, figuratively, swallowing the largest unclean beast in the land.

Under our wings, people should see the big picture. For example, as long as there is a world to reach for Jesus, we should have no time, or energy, for petty issues. Yet so much of our time is dedicated to whether or not someone from church waved to us.

Mat 23:25 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence.

Mat 23:26 Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also.

This isn't talking about washing your dishes; it's referring to specific rituals you were required to perform before you could eat or drink - rituals not prescribed at all in God's law, but added by the Pharisees, so that they would appear more spiritual.

The rituals that God did prescribe were intended only to remind us of the need for inner cleansing, or what we might call the pursuit of holiness.

I can appear to be spiritual, while hiding gross sin. My serving The Lord doesn't cleanse me. For that I need to repent and thank Jesus for shedding His blood that makes me white as snow.

Under our wings, a lot of repenting ought to be going on.

Mat 23:27 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness.

Mat 23:28 Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

Under the law you were considered ceremonially unclean if you inadvertently touched a tomb. Tombs were regularly whitewashed to mark them so you might avoid them.

If a Pharisee was a whitewashed tomb, then you should avoid contact with them, and avoid being influenced by them.

"Lawlessness" is better translated *uncleanness*, referring to moral and/or physical impurity. I'd apply it to believers who have taken their liberties in Christ too far in that they want to flaunt them.

Under wings like that lurks danger for believers who can be led into sin, stumbled into partaking of things that are not right for them.

Mat 23:29 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous,

Mat 23:30 and say, 'If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.'

Mat 23:31 "Therefore you are witnesses against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets.

Mat 23:32 Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers' guilt.

Mat 23:33 Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell?

No way would they have killed the prophets - or so they thought. While they were thinking that, they were planning to kill **the** Prophet promised by Moses - their Messiah, Jesus the Christ.

Under *your* wings - is Jesus your all-in-all? Is He everything to you? Is He the answer you seek, and the answer you give when asked the most important questions in life?

Under your wings should not be a place for worldly wisdom, for the philosophies of men. It should be the place where the Gospel is the power of God to salvation, and where God the Holy Spirit is depended upon to transform lives.

Maybe this will help. Whatever **you** find under God's wings - others ought to be able to find who come under *your* wings.

#2 What Is It Like For People Who Refuse To Be Taken Under Jesus' Wings?

(v34-39)

The Pharisees did everything they could to keep Jews from following Jesus. The result of the official rejection of Jesus as King by Israel would result in their destruction and dispersion throughout the world, for a time of national discipline.

Here is how Jesus depicted it:

Mat 23:34 Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes: some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city,

Mat 23:35 that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar.

Jesus not only foresaw His own death; He plainly told the Pharisees that they would murder some of the messengers whom He would send immediately after Him. Some who escaped martyrdom would be scourged in the synagogues and persecuted from city to city. This is exactly what you see in the Book of Acts.

By seeing to it Jesus was killed, and by killing those who came after Him, they would show that they were exactly like their forefathers, if not worse.

Mat 23:36 Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.

We have the benefit of history, and know that around 70AD, Titus and the Roman legions sieged, then destroyed, Jerusalem and the Temple.

Mat 23:37 "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!

Mat 23:38 See! Your house is left to you desolate;

In spite of all the rebellion of Israel, all the blood they shed by killing God's servants, The Lord desired to shelter, to protect, to instruct, to save them, by taking them under the strong shelter of His wings.

Instead, the Roman eagle would swoop down upon them, unprotected and vulnerable, to leave their "house," the Temple, "desolate."

Note, in passing, Jesus has twice mentioned "Hell." Both times He meant the place of eternal, conscious torment. Refuse to be taken under His wings, and Hell is your destiny.

Allow me to spend a moment on The Lord's analysis that He was *willing* to save them, but they were *unwilling* to be saved.

Jesus thought grace was resistible. God is not willing that any should perish, but that all would come to repentance and faith. His grace in salvation works upon your heart, to free your will to be able to receive or reject eternal life.

If you are not a believer, God's grace is freeing your will, right now, to decide whether to receive Him, or to go on rejecting Him.

His desire is to take you under the shelter of His wings; and, believe me, that's the place you want to be in these last days.

Mat 23:39 for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, 'BLESSED is HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD!' "

As a point of fact, after Jesus rose from the dead, He was seen only by believers. No nonbelieving Jew or Gentile laid eyes on Him.

Big, BIG, promise here: Jesus will return to the nation of Israel, and the Jews who are alive when He does will receive Him, and He will establish the Kingdom of Heaven on the earth.

I'd like to again address any nonbeliever. Think hard about this illustration. You spend your lifetime desiring a relationship in which you are loved, cherished, and protected. One in which you can grow and realize your potential. Where you can be you, and become the 'you' that you want to be.

You won't find wings like that *except* in a relationship with Jesus. Come to Him as He is calling out to you.

For us believers... Like it or not, people will come under your wings, as you go, making disciples.

What's it like under there - really?

