

Matthew 11:15

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

Analysis

'He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.' This refrain (repeated in Matthew 13:9, 13:43, Mark 4:9, Luke 8:8, Revelation 2-3) distinguishes physical hearing from spiritual comprehension. Everyone has physical ears, but 'ears to hear' spiritually is God's gift (Matthew 13:11). The phrase is both invitation and warning: invitation to those with spiritual capacity to understand and act on Jesus's words; warning that many will hear audibly without comprehending spiritually (Matthew 13:13-15). Jesus thus divides His audience: those with regenerated hearts hear and obey; those with hardened hearts hear and resist. Reformed theology sees this demonstrating the necessity of divine illumination—natural human capacity cannot grasp spiritual truth (1 Corinthians 2:14). The Holy Spirit must open ears and hearts. This provides both humility (if you understand, it's God's gift) and urgency (respond to what you hear lest hardness increase). The verse also implies accountability: hearing brings responsibility. Those who hear clearly will give account for their response (Luke 12:48).

Historical Context

This formula echoes Old Testament prophetic calls: 'Hear, O Israel' (Deuteronomy 6:4), Isaiah's lament over those with ears but don't hear (Isaiah 6:9-10), Ezekiel's contrast between those who hear and refuse versus those who hear and obey (Ezekiel 3:27). Jesus employs prophetic pattern: after delivering significant teaching, He issues this summons, distinguishing receptive from resistant hearers. The original audience heard the same words but with vastly different results: disciples believed and followed; religious leaders rejected and plotted murder. This

pattern continued through church history. The same sermons that ignited Protestant Reformation hardened others against it. The same gospel message that transforms some repels others. Jesus's formula thus proves prophetically accurate across two millennia: spiritual hearing depends not on message clarity, preacher eloquence, or intellectual capacity, but on God's sovereign gift of regeneration opening ears and hearts.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. How do you cultivate spiritual hearing—sensitivity to God's Word beyond mere intellectual comprehension?
2. What evidence demonstrates you have 'ears to hear'—how does understanding translate to obedience?
3. What does this repeated formula teach about the nature of faith and the necessity of divine grace for belief?

Interlinear Text

ὁ	ἐχων	ὤτα	ἀκουέτω	ἀκουέτω
G3588	He that hath	ears	let him hear	let him hear
	G2192	G3775	G191	G191

Additional Cross-References

Matthew 13:9 (Parallel theme): Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.

Luke 8:8 (Parallel theme): And other fell on good ground, and sprang up, and bare fruit an hundredfold. And when he had said these things, he cried, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

Mark 4:23 (Parallel theme): If any man have ears to hear, let him hear.

Matthew 13:43 (Parallel theme): Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.

Revelation 3:13 (Parallel theme): He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

Revelation 2:7 (Parallel theme): He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.

Mark 4:9 (Parallel theme): And he said unto them, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

Luke 14:35 (Parallel theme): It is neither fit for the land, nor yet for the dunghill; but men cast it out. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

Revelation 2:29 (Parallel theme): He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

Revelation 3:6 (Parallel theme): He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.