

Matthew 11:16

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is like unto children sitting in the markets, and calling unto their fellows,

Analysis

'But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear.' Jesus pronounces His disciples blessed (μακάριοι/makarioi, supremely happy, fortunate) because they possess spiritual sight and hearing—God's gracious gift. This beatitude contrasts sharply with verse 15's description of those whose eyes and ears remain spiritually closed. The blessing isn't for superior intellect, moral achievement, or religious effort but for receiving God's revelation. The verb tenses matter: 'they see' and 'they hear' (present active) indicate ongoing spiritual perception. Reformed theology recognizes this as effectual calling and illumination—God opens blind eyes and deaf ears, enabling His elect to perceive and receive gospel truth. This blessing surpasses material prosperity, political power, or worldly success. Those who see Christ's glory, understand His gospel, and hear His voice possess earth's supreme privilege. Yet it's pure grace—they didn't earn spiritual sight but received it as gift. This provides assurance: if you understand and believe, God has opened your eyes and ears. It also cultivates gratitude: spiritual perception is privileged gift, not natural human capacity.

Historical Context

Jesus addressed His disciples—the Twelve and perhaps wider circle of followers (see Matthew 5:1, 13:36)—distinguishing them from crowds and religious leaders who heard but didn't understand. The disciples hadn't achieved superior education or religious status. They were Galilean fishermen, tax collectors, zealots—ordinary people. Yet they received what Pharisees, scribes, and Israel's elites missed: they

recognized Jesus as Messiah, understood His teaching (with help—see Matthew 16:16-17), and followed Him. This pattern—God revealing truth to the simple while hiding it from the wise—runs throughout Scripture (Matthew 11:25-26, 1 Corinthians 1:26-29). It continued in church history: God used uneducated preachers to spark revivals, simple believers to advance gospel, ordinary people to shame philosophical elites. The disciples' blessedness came not from themselves but from God's sovereign choice to illumine them. Paul expresses similar thanksgiving (Ephesians 1:17-18): prayer that God would give believers enlightened eyes to know Him better—recognition that spiritual sight is ongoing divine gift.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Study Questions

1. How does recognizing spiritual sight as God's gift rather than your achievement affect your pride and gratitude?
2. What evidence demonstrates you have eyes that truly see and ears that truly hear—beyond intellectual assent to heart transformation?
3. How should this blessing shape your prayer for those who remain spiritually blind and deaf?

Interlinear Text

Τίνι	δὲ	ὁμοιώσω	τὴν	γενεὰν	ταύτην	ὁμοία	ἐστὶν
whereunto	But	shall I liken	G3588	generation	G3778	like	It is
G5101	G1161	G3666		G1074		G3664	G2076
παιδαρίοις	ἐν	ἀγοραῖς	καθημένοις	καὶ	προσφωνοῦσιν		
unto children	in	the markets	sitting	and	calling		
G3808	G1722	G58	G2521	G2532	G4377		
τοῖς	ἐταίροις	αὐτῶν,					
G3588	fellows	G846					
	G2083						

Additional Cross-References

Mark 4:30 (Parallel theme): And he said, Whereunto shall we liken the kingdom of God? or with what comparison shall we compare it?

Matthew 23:36 (Parallel theme): Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation.

Luke 13:18 (Parallel theme): Then said he, Unto what is the kingdom of God like? and whereunto shall I resemble it?

Lamentations 2:13 (Parallel theme): What thing shall I take to witness for thee? what thing shall I liken to thee, O daughter of Jerusalem? what shall I equal to thee, that I may comfort thee, O virgin daughter of Zion? for thy breach is great like the sea: who can heal thee?

Matthew 12:34 (Parallel theme): O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.

Matthew 24:34 (Parallel theme): Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled.