

Matthew 13:9

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.

Analysis

Who hath ears to hear, let him hear. This phrase appears repeatedly in Jesus's teaching (Matthew 11:15, 13:43, Mark 4:9, 23, Revelation 2-3). The Greek ὁ ἔχων ὡτα ἀκούειν ἀκουέτω (ho echōn ota akouein akouetō) is a call to spiritual discernment beyond mere physical hearing.

Everyone present had physical ears, yet Jesus distinguishes between hearing sounds and truly comprehending spiritual truth. This echoes Isaiah 6:9-10, which Jesus later quotes (Matthew 13:14-15): 'Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand.' Physical hearing doesn't guarantee spiritual perception; that requires divine illumination and receptive hearts.

The phrase serves as both invitation and warning. It invites those whom God has given spiritual ears to pay careful attention, to meditate deeply, to seek understanding. It warns that spiritual truth is not automatically grasped by all; there are those who hear the words but remain spiritually deaf, understanding nothing.

This relates to Jesus's use of parables. He spoke in parables partly to reveal truth to His disciples while concealing it from hard-hearted opponents (Matthew 13:10-17). Parables separate true seekers from casual listeners. Those with 'ears to hear'—regenerate hearts, Spirit-given faith—will understand; others will hear stories but miss their meaning.

Historical Context

Jesus taught multitudes by the Sea of Galilee, using parables drawn from agricultural life familiar to His audience. Yet these simple stories contained profound kingdom mysteries accessible only to faith.

This phrase's repetition in Revelation (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22) shows its enduring importance. The risen Christ still calls churches to hear with spiritual understanding, not just physical ears. Throughout church history, this call has separated nominal professors from genuine believers.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. How can we cultivate 'ears to hear'—what spiritual disciplines and heart attitudes enable us to truly grasp God's word rather than merely hear it?
2. Why does Jesus use this phrase particularly after parables—what does this teach about the nature of spiritual truth and who can understand it?
3. In what ways might we be guilty of hearing God's word physically without truly hearing it spiritually, and how can we guard against such hardness of heart?

Interlinear Text

ο	ἔχων	Ὥτα	ἀκουέτω	ἀκουέτω
Who	hath	ears	let him hear	let him hear
G3588	G2192	G3775	G191	G191

Additional Cross-References

Revelation 2:11 (Parallel theme): He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.

Matthew 11:15 (Parallel theme): He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

Revelation 2:17 (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 hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.

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.

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.

Revelation 3:22 (Parallel theme): He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

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

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

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