

Ears To Hear

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Fifteen times Jesus said, “*He who has ears to hear, let him hear*” or, “*He who has an ear, let him hear*” (Matthew 11:15; Revelation 2:7 et. al.). Possessing ears doesn’t guarantee that you have “ears to hear” (i.e. that you are of a mind to listen, understand, and heed what is said).

Luke 6:17 tells of a great crowd from numerous places coming for the specific purpose of hearing Jesus. At the close of His earthly ministry the common people in the temple “*were very attentive to hear Him,*” frustrating the efforts of the Sanhedrin to kill Him then (Luke 19:47-48). And in Acts 13:7 the governor Sergius Paulus “*called for Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of the Lord.*”

In stark contrast, when the Sanhedrin heard the plain truth about Jesus from Stephen, “*they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord; and they cast him out of the city and stoned him*” (Acts 7:57-58). Ironically, the same Saul who headed that mob later preached Christ to Sergius Paulus (see above)! Better known as Paul, he warned Timothy that “*the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn away their ears from the truth, and be turned aside to fables*” (2 Timothy 4:3-4).

Which of the two preceding paragraphs best describes you? Do you have “ears to hear,” or “itching ears”? Are you “very attentive to hear,” or does plain truth make you stop your ears? What appeals to you more, sound doctrine or fables? Think about it!

Consider Your Ways!

After 70 years of captivity, God graciously allowed the Israelites to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple. In Ezra 3:10, the work began with great joy. Soon afterward however, the Israelites let their adversaries stop the work, and the Temple of God remained barren and desolate.

The message God sent through Haggai was: “*Consider your ways!*” (Haggai 1:5). They were saying the time wasn’t right to build God’s house (Haggai 1:2), but they were building their own houses. They weren’t just building bare-bones shelters either; they were building paneled houses – elaborate, decorated houses (Haggai 1:4). They were willing to put in the effort for themselves, but not for God. They needed to consider their ways.

Are we like the Israelites? Where are our priorities? Are we spending more time on our houses, lawns, and cars than we spend on God’s work?

Jesus made it known up front we cannot be His disciples unless we make Him first in our lives (Luke 14:25-35). Often, we are baptized with great rejoicing and are on fire for God. Soon, however, the worries of life and the desire for our comfort cause that fire to dwindle to nothingness. It is important we are not just good starters, but good finishers. We need to consider our ways.

--Jeremy Sprouse (via Campbellsville, KY)

SATAN’S PATIENCE

When Christians describe Satan’s character, we often use words like “cunning,” “deceitful,” “evil,” “clever,” and “vicious.” While these adjectives are certainly applicable, a speaker I heard mentioned another one of Satan’s attributes we often fail to internalize – “patient.”

Patience is usually held in high regard, but sometimes patience is bad. Have you considered Satan’s patience? If you think about it, it’s spot on.

The Bible is full of strong leaders that Satan attacked in the “second half,” “fourth quarter,” “ninth inning,” “eighteenth hole” (you pick the sports analogy) of their lives. In the final stretch of faithfulness, Satan made his move. When did Noah get drunk and expose himself? After spending a century building the ark. When did Moses strike the rock and lose the Promised Land? After leading Israel through the Red Sea. When did David commit adultery and cover up his infidelity with conspired murder? After proving himself to be a strong warrior and competent King.

Satan will gladly wait to wreak havoc if delay will produce the strongest blow. God is not the only one who is “patient.” Satan is, too.

Therefore, it is imperative for God’s people to finish strong. We mustn’t excel in the first half, only to crumble in the final possession. We must finish what we began because God never halts His transformative goodness.

The apostle Paul reminded the young preacher Timothy, “*I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith*” (2 Timothy 4:7). How easy it would have been for Paul to quit on his last lap. Satan would have loved nothing more. Paul was no stranger to suffering, but neither was he a surrenderer to adversity.

We never know which day will be our last, so each moment we press on to the finish (Philippians 3:14). Spiritually speaking, none of us want to be the Dallas Cowboys who win the division but can’t finish the job. We want to be the Texas Rangers who hold the trophy high at the end of the season (the 2023 Texas Rangers, that is 😊). Or something like that.

My friends, finish strong! I’m pulling for you. And Go Rangers!

--Jacob Hawk (via Facebook, adapted)