

Answers and Questions

ANSWERS AND QUESTIONS

Paul G. Hiebert

We love answers. As children we constantly ask 'why?' As adults we take tests, look at game shows, play Trivial Pursuits, and share the latest 'news.' We rarely stop to look at the questions we ask, and whether they are worth answering. We have given right answers to trivial questions, and fail to ask important questions of life.

Jesus asked his disciples two questions we all must answer (Matt. 16:13-20). The answers to which have profound consequences for our lives.

“Who do people say I am?”

The people in Jesus' day had many opinions about him. Many saw him as a great healer. They followed him because he healed and fed them, but when he stopped doing so, they left him. Others saw him as a great teacher. His teachings were fresh and profound, and worth their consideration. But when he made absurd claims to be the Messiah sent from God, he had gone too far, and they turned to other teachers. Still others accused him of sorcery. They said he healed with Satan's power, and led the people astray.

Today people have many of the same opinions about Jesus. He is a great healer, a great teacher, a great moral leader, a model for us all, they say. Others accusing him of being a fraud.

“Who do you say I am?”

Jesus then challenged his disciples, and forced them to take a stand. It was easy to talk about who Jesus is. It was another thing to declare themselves and live by that affirmation. Either they would have to give up all to follow him, or they, if they were honest, would have to leave him as a false prophet.

Today Jesus challenges each of us with that question. This is not an intellectual exercise. It demands a whole life response. Our answer will determine who we really are.

“Who does Jesus say he is?”

Implicit in Jesus’ interrogation of his disciples are two other questions. First, who does he claim to be? It is clear that Jesus claimed to be more than a healer, teacher, moral leader and model human. He boldly made the claim that he was God who took on humanity to save humankind. It is this claim that we must face. Either his claim is true, or he is a fraud. There is no middle ground. This the real question the world must face today in an age of rival claims and religious pluralism. Is Jesus’ claim to be the Messiah, the Savior of the world, true?

“Who does Jesus say we are?”

The final and most important question is not who do we think Jesus is, it is who does he say we are. In the end it is Christ Jesus who will judge us (2 Tim. 4:1), not we who will judge him. At that time our answers are important only because they determine his response. Too often in our discussion of religious pluralism we talk to one another, and leave out the most important person in the conversation, God Himself.