

Would Jesus Require a \$54 Million Private Jet?

Faith preacher Jesse Duplantis told the world last month that God wants him to own a \$54 million Falcon 7X private jet. And he's challenging donors to help him buy it.

"Some people believe preachers shouldn't have jets," Duplantis said in a video he posted online on May 21. "I really believe that if Jesus was physically on the earth today He wouldn't be riding a donkey. ... He'd be in an airplane preaching the gospel all over the world."

The popular Louisiana minister, who is 68, is known for his folksy Cajun accent and downhome humor. But he was not cracking a joke when he announced his need for the pricey three-engine plane, which can fly up to 592 miles per hour. He was dead serious.

Duplantis' request didn't go over well when his video went viral. Secular news reporters called him a charlatan. Some Christians condemned him as a con artist. In a social media post, gospel singer Kirk Franklin accused Duplantis of exploiting poor people.

"Many of these 'ministries' [like Duplantis'] built their wealth on the backs of poor, rural minorities that put their trust in the hands of 'God's shepherds,' only to see the prosperity benefit those doing the preaching," Franklin said in an Instagram post.

Duplantis' fans, however, weren't shocked by his request. They have helped him buy three previous jets. The jovial preacher, who lives in a \$3 million, 35,000-square-foot mansion, believes financial prosperity is his reward for preaching the gospel. He tells his followers that they, too, can be rich if they give generously.

In a response to the jet controversy, which was posted on YouTube this week, Duplantis said God clearly spoke to him about acquiring the jet to replace an older one. "The Lord said, "I didn't ask you to pay for [the plane], I asked you to believe for it." The evangelist is fully expectant that the money he needs will be provided.

I won't be surprised if Duplantis gets his Falcon 7X. A wealthy donor is likely to fork over the entire \$54 million. But as a traveling minister who has flown to 32 countries on commercial airlines—usually in cramped tourist class seats—I still don't believe Duplantis' theology about private planes is sound. In fact, I believe Duplantis is in danger of hurting the cause of the gospel.

Here are the top reasons I wouldn't support his private jet plan:

1. Private jets are a wasteful use of donor funds. Preachers can give you a litany of reasons why they need to fly direct to their destination: Time saved, less stress, no worries about lost luggage. (Not to mention more legroom!)

But the Bible calls us to be good stewards of God's resources. Private aircraft cost an exorbitant amount of money compared to commercial flights because owners must provide service and upkeep on the vehicles. If a preacher insists on renting a private jet, the cost to fly from Fort Lauderdale to New York would be in the ballpark of \$59,000, compared to a \$652 ticket on a commercial plane. People who own private jets spend as much as \$4 million a year just on maintenance.

If an evangelist needs to fly to the most remote village of Borneo, and there are no commercial planes going there, then I can understand the need for a private plane. But Duplantis is not going to Borneo. According to his website, some of his upcoming meetings are in Nashville, Tennessee; Detroit,

Michigan; and Tacoma, Washington. Even first-class seats on Delta Airlines to those locations are a fraction of the cost of private air travel.

2. Ministers who demand luxury deny the core of the gospel. We are confronted every day by the reality of poverty and suffering in our world, and we know that true followers of Christ are called to give and share, not take and hoard. We also know that a preacher who gets rich off of the offerings of poor people is actually involved in exploitation—a sin which Scripture strongly condemns. When the skeptical younger generation sees this, they assume all Christian ministers are fakes and frauds.
3. The world doesn't need a message of greed. The prosperity gospel became hugely popular during the 1980s, when many Christians in the United States were riding a wave of American capitalism. But many of the get-rich preachers of that era either landed in jail or fell morally, and we reaped a whirlwind of bad fruit. We were supposed to learn a lesson from that failed experiment. God blesses us not so we can become selfish consumers but so we can become selfless channels of His blessings to others.
4. Jesus did indeed ride a donkey. If Jesus had used Jesse Duplantis' logic during His ministry on earth, He would have asked His disciples to collect money from the crowds to buy a gold chariot drawn by Caesar's best horses. But He didn't do that. He rode on the back of a rented donkey, the transportation of a poor man. He didn't require a first-class seat or a luxury vehicle.

Jesus took the lowest seat and invited all of us to model servanthood. I pray we will rediscover humility. Let's show our cynical culture that God's ministers don't demand luxury treatment.