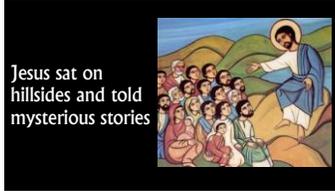


In 1st century Jerusalem, it was widely expected

that the Messiah would lead the Jews to over through the occupying Roman forces ... instead

Screen 1



Jesus (the Messiah) sat on hillsides and told mysterious stories.

(Sojourners Magazine, Nov. 2006, p. 43)



Screen 2

Believing that Jesus was God's son;

And believing that he could amass power enough to bring demise upon the Roman forces; Surely such an amazing show of dominance would have made him very, very famous in the known world of his time.

To the Jew and to many others that were forcibly brought under Roman rule,

Roman occupation was like being controlled by Isis ... it was a brutal control for anyone who challenged Roman authority – instead of beheading, it was crucifixion ... a far more torturous and drawn out form of execution.

So, if Jesus would have commanded a military machine

strong enough to dismantle Roman subjugation ... he would have, indeed, been insanely popular among the conquered world and conquered people of his time.



Screen 3

But Jesus didn't do that (even though he could have) ... instead on hillsides

telling mysterious stories about us and about God, something that made him popular to a degree (I suppose) in the small circles traveled – but it didn't make him worldly famous at the time.

Seems that

seeking & having notoriety, amassing power ... these were not things in which Jesus was highly invested.

Yet all of us crave some sense of notoriety, don't we;



all of us, on some level, seek power
circle of our own

Screen 4... even if only in the

lives and relationships ... we seek
power to control others, even if only in a
limited way, to bend them toward our
will, to do what we want them to do
and to think how we want them to think.

The ways of God have always perplexed us ... ambition for power & craving recognition

easily becomes (for us) the motivation for what we do, even if what we do helps another, there
still is that (conscious or unconscious) underlying current of *“What’s in it for me?”*

JESUS DIDN'T
THINK THAT WAY

Screen 5

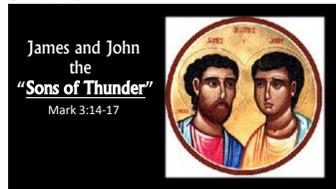
JESUS DIDN'T THINK THAT WAY

PAGE 2

So, we come upon James and John today (two of Jesus beloved disciples) who felt comfortable
enough with Jesus to make a rather bold request ... to be at Jesus’ side when Jesus comes into
some state of recognized glory – I think we could say they meant “glory” on
either side of the grave, whichever came first.

Their desire, the request reveals, was about power and
“What’s in it for me?” ... in following Jesus.

Screen 6



These two guys, James and John,
3:14-17) there is some

Jesus calls the **“Sons of Thunder”** (Mark

dispute if that is an accurate translation as we read it in Mark’s Gospel, but the designation
seems to bear the sense of a person who is loud and boisterous,
a person bold to speak their mind in not so tactful a way,
a person with a lot of bark, but no bite, a windbag.

They were fisherman who worked long hard hours on the water under the sun ... their

commitment to that task, day in and day out, wasn't to see glorious sunrises and beautiful sunsets on the sea ... their commitment to the task was tied to "*What's in it for me?*"

So it's not surprising that these two brawny boisterous guys, not very concerned about what others think, are basically asking Jesus about "*what's in it for them*" ... can they attain some of Jesus' power & glory in their following him, in being his disciples.

Is there some pay off here?

Is there some kind of reward?

Like catching a good haul of fish after a hard day's work.

"What's in it for us Jesus?"

"Since we've given up everything to follow you, Teacher ... we want something back from you ... some of your power & glory"

"We want you to give us something."

"Kind of like a paycheck for our time"

All of that (we could say) is contained

in the bold request of ... "*Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.*"

Writer William Carter in his book,

No Box Seats in the Kingdom (CSS Publishing) writes: **Despite the pious and religious things we say in church circles, at any given time, less than 5% of any group in the church is operating with purely Christian motivation. The other 95% are asking, "WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME?"**

**"WHAT'S IN IT
FOR ME?"**

Screen 7

PAGE 3

That's a sobering thought ... but it's not surprising, actually.

It's part of our "curved inward" human nature

for an inordinate self interest to always be operating in us to one degree or another

at any given time ... In theological lingo, we call that sin ... an inward curve pointing us away from God and toward a "*What's in it for me- power seeking*" way of living and making decisions.

In our life and times, a whole marketing & political world is predicated upon

self interest ... The slick advertising blitz that tells you, YOU deserve & need a certain commodity – Marketers know that *What's in it for me* sells products

The political world we all are currently living in the midst of is about power ... Who will control the senate?

Who will control the house?

What political posture stacks the Supreme Court ... in the end, we vote (most times) and give power to the one who will serve our self-interest, not the interest of those in need, or for the interest of an increasingly polluted environment.

And isn't it also true, that

when we see people blatantly operating from self-interest we get mad at them, we criticize & judge them.



Psychologists call this **“projection”** Screen 8 ... when we POINT OUT and see very clearly something distasteful in someone else that is also very much a part of who we are.

The other ten disciples,

when they catch wind of what James and John were asking ... they have a strong reaction:

When the ten heard this, they became very angry

with James and John (Mark 10:41)

Well, Jesus may not have had a term for this psychological dynamic

we today call projection, but he did have a response to it when he saw it happening ... he said something like this when teaching the crowds about judgment:

Hypocrite! First get rid of the log in your own eye;

then you will see well enough to deal with the speck in your friend's eye. (Matthew 7:5).

PAGE 4



The take home here, is that Screen 9

we are James and John,

we are the other ten disciples,

we are no different than they ... some aspects of our inner heart and motivations is

laid bare in this reading that we hear today – Jesus knows us ... and it's difficult to feel good about some of the things he knows.

But the comfort is, Jesus continues

on with us anyway, just like he did the disciples ... believing that we can be better,
that we can learn,
that we can change.

He takes the opportunity here

with James and John and the rest of the twelve to turn this embarrassing event (on the disciples part) ... he takes the opportunity to turn it into a teaching moment.

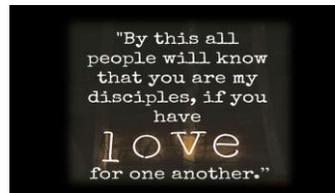
Screen 10



He instructs them

that being servants is what will set them apart from the ways of the world ... because servants look not to advance their own interests, but to tend the needs of others.

True servant hood in the spirit of Jesus is about as far away from "What's in it for me" as it gets ... we serve because it is a direct outcome of Jesus final



Screen 11 *Love one another as I*

command to us before his crucifixion
have loved you, by

this everyone will know that you are my disciples, that you have love for one another. (John 13:34-35)

Our whole worship service today and for the most part, every week, drives home

Screen 12



the theme of service
the service

... from the Call to Worship at the beginning of

to the Dismissal at the end;

from the Hymn of the Day after the sermon
to the choir anthem during the offering;
the Communion Blessing, the Offertory ... all mention service.

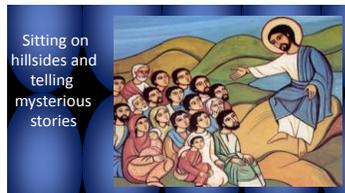
PAGE 5

In fact, I counted 23 times

the word serve,
service,
servant, or
serving ... in the bulletin,
the theme cannot be missed today or any week.

We come here to worship God ... we leave to serve

This is who we are.
This is who God calls us to be.
This is who God expects us to be.



So yes, Jesus sat on hillsides and Screen 13

told mysterious stories about us and about God ... and though the stories were mysterious

and hard to figure out sometimes – a key to the mystery of his stories will always have something to do with being a servant without wondering about “*What’s in it for me.*”

AMEN