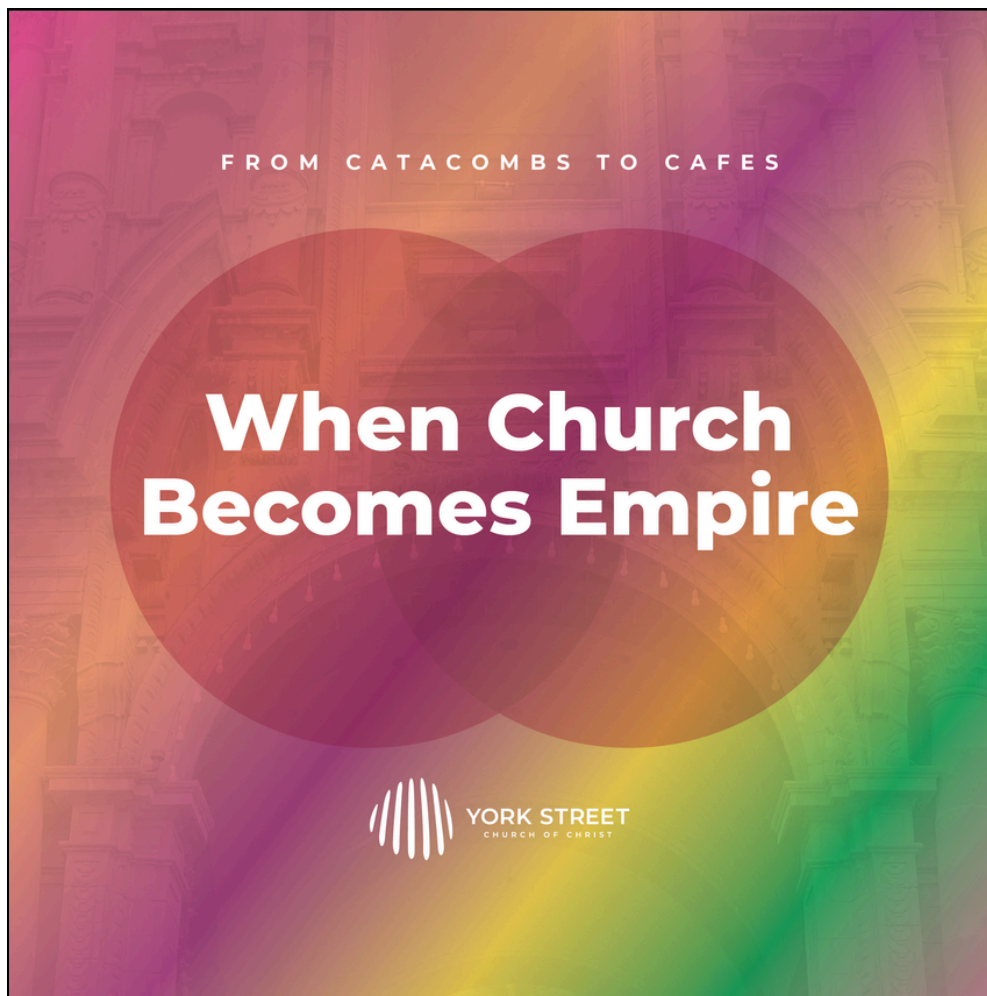




From Catacombs to Cafes
When Church Becomes Empire

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION
QUESTIONS

SUNDAY 13 September 2026

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When Church Becomes Empire

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GETTING STARTED

Church history gives us many examples of what can happen when the Church becomes closely connected with political power, influence and systems of domination. From around 300 AD onwards, Christianity increasingly became connected with the Roman Empire, and over the following centuries the Church could sometimes look more like an empire than the servant community Jesus established.

Yet when we return to Scripture, we find a very different picture of Christian authority. **Jesus does not lead through domination, force or control. He leads through humility, sacrifice and service.**

Philippians 2:5–11 gives us the ultimate example. Jesus, though having the very nature of God, “made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant.” His authority was demonstrated through surrender and obedience—even to death on a cross.

The Gospel is therefore deeply **counter-cultural**. Jesus invites people to follow Him rather than forcing them to submit. His kingdom operates differently from the kingdoms of this world.

- How is Jesus' approach to leadership different from what our culture often celebrates?
- How can the Church be tempted to rely on influence rather than Jesus?

INTO THE WORD

In **2 Corinthians 10:1–6**, Paul describes the weapons of Christian ministry as being fundamentally different from worldly weapons. “The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world.” The goal is not to control people but to challenge arguments and bring thoughts into obedience to Christ.

Paul's own example is important. He appeals to the Corinthians “by the humility and gentleness of Christ” (v.1). His authority comes from Christ, yet he exercises that authority through Christlike humility.

Philippians 2 takes us to the heart of this way of life. Jesus willingly emptied Himself, took the form of a servant and humbled Himself. His exaltation came through His obedience and sacrifice.

Then **1 Peter 5:1–4** speaks directly to church leaders. Peter instructs them to shepherd God's people “not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.” Christian leadership is not about possessing people; it is about serving people.

- What do these passages teach us about the source of Christian authority?
- What does it mean to lead through “the humility and gentleness of Christ”?

GOING DEEPER

These Scriptures invite us to examine the way we understand **power, leadership and influence**. Jesus doesn't call His Church to dominate culture but to demonstrate another way of living within it.

Christian authority is most powerful when it looks like Jesus: **serving rather than controlling, inviting rather than forcing, sacrificing rather than taking, and modelling rather than dominating.**

This doesn't mean the Church has no authority. It means our authority is **Christ-centred and Christ-shaped**. We represent a King who conquered not by taking a throne through force, but by giving Himself away.

The challenge for us is to ask whether our churches, leadership and relationships reflect this upside-down Kingdom. Are people drawn towards Jesus because they experience His humility and love through us?

The Gospel is an invitation: **"Come and follow Jesus."** Our task is not to force people into the Kingdom but to faithfully embody the King.

- What would servant leadership look like in your church, family, workplace or relationships?
- What would change if the Church measured success by faithfulness and service rather than influence and power?

Pray