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Christian History Made Easy Participant Guide

10. Session 4: Christianity on the Move (AD 300–500)

After persecution ended and Rome embraced Christianity, the faith faced new challenges: comfort and power instead of danger. This session traces how believers responded — some fleeing to desert monasteries, others clarifying who Jesus is through a series of church councils. Meanwhile barbarians sacked Rome, the Western Empire crumbled, and leaders like Augustine helped Christians see a lasting 'city of God' beyond earthly empires.

Key takeaways

- When Christianity became legal and then the official religion of Rome, the line between earthly power and true spiritual leadership blurred. Jesus' model is the opposite: the servant who is last of all.
- Monks (Anthony of Egypt) and later monastic communities (Benedict's Rule) grew from two motives — escaping the world's distractions and imitating godly examples. Monks and nuns also preserved learning through their schools.

- Four councils settled who Jesus is: Nicaea (325) — equal to the Father; Constantinople (381) — fully God and fully man; Ephesus (431) — one person; Chalcedon (451) — one person with two natures, human and divine.
- Key errors rejected: Apollinarianism (no human spirit), Nestorianism (two persons), and Eutychianism/monophysitism (one blended nature). Orthodoxy is dyophysitism — two natures in perfect harmony.
- When Visigoths sacked Rome (410), pagans blamed Christianity. Augustine answered in *The City of God*, showing that earthly kingdoms fall but God's city endures.
- The bishop of Rome gradually gained authority — helped by Rome's political prestige and the tradition of Peter and Paul — until 'pope' became his special title (Gregory, 590).

Passages worth keeping

“If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all.”

Jesus redefines leadership as servanthood — the chapter's lens on church power.

“God works even through tragic events for the glory of his Son and for the good of his people.”

How Christians made sense of Rome's fall and the barbarian invasions.

How it connects

The whole session turns on Philippians 2:1–11: real authority in Christ's kingdom looks like self-emptying service, not lordship — a needed correction just as the church gained worldly power.

Scripture referenced

- **Mark 9:35** -- Greatness is servanthood — the model for spiritual leadership.
- **John 15:19; 17:14–16** -- In the world but not of it — the tension monastics wrestled with.
- **Matthew 16:18** -- 'Keys to the kingdom' — basis for claims about Peter and the papacy.
- **Romans 8:28–29** -- God works through tragedy for good — response to Rome's fall.
- **Romans 13:11–14** -- The text that converted Augustine.
- **Proverbs 1:7** -- Fear of the Lord as the foundation of Chrysostom's view of education.