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Pastoral Leadership as a Ministry of Empowerment

The most explicit distinction between leadership among believers and leadership outside the community of Jesus' followers is made by Jesus himself: "You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great men exercise authority over them. **But it is not this way among you**, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all" (Mark 10:42-44). Jesus spoke these words in response to the request of James and John, namely, that when Jesus assumes authority in God's kingdom, they could assume the second and third highest position (Mark 10:35-41). Jesus was also responding to the other disciples' angry reaction against the two brothers who "got ahead" of them (Mark 10:42). Clearly, all the disciples were jockeying for a better position and aspiring to be numbers 2 and 3, and not just the sons of Zebedee, except that they got to ask first. This is why Jesus responded by showing them that his followers should operate on a different principle, that is, one of servanthood. This much is clear, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).

That we should be servants like our Lord is not difficult to understand. What servanthood "looks like" may be a bit difficult to define. Does servanthood mean that we should be cleaning toilets or serving

tables or washing dishes? Or do we just obey what we are told to do? These may all be evidence of servanthood, and church leaders who are willing to do even menial tasks are indeed commendable as long as they do them with pure intentions. But before we jump to application, it may be good to go back to what the text says: "You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great men exercise authority over them. But it is not this way among you..." The last statement clearly shows that Jesus is making a distinction between his followers and the rulers of the world. Jesus' injunction to his followers is crystal clear, "Do not lord-it-over those under your authority..." This command is obviously more applicable to those who are in some capacity of leadership. But we need to go back to the question of interpretation before we can think of application. What does "lord-it-over them" mean? My first instinct is to ask what is the Greek word used here. In this particular case, it seems that the word the Gospel writers used can enlighten us. Mark used the word *katakurieuō*, the same word used in its parallel passage (Matt. 20:25) and in Peter's command to the pastors of the Christian churches in the northern Mediterranean regions (1 Pet. 5:3). The latter two passages are not really helpful in understanding Jesus' statement in Mark 10:42-44. This requires us to look at other instances in the New Testament or even in the Greek Old Testament where the word *katakurieuō* is used.

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Mark 10:42-44

And here is a list of passages where the word is used:

1. Israel conquering (*katakurieuō*) the land, suggesting that they have rendered the original inhabitants powerless (Num. 32:22, 29); or one nation exercising dominion (*katakurieuō*) over another (Dan. 11:39; cf. Ps. 10:5 [9:26, LXX]).
2. The Messiah subduing (*katakurieuō*) all his enemies, rendering them powerless by being made his footstool (Ps. 110:2 [109:2, LXX]).
3. A lion catching (*katakurieuō*) his prey, rendering it powerless before devouring it (Ps. 10:9 [9:31, LXX]).
4. Sin having dominion (*katakurieuō*) over humans (Ps. 119:133 [118:133, LXX]; cf. 19:13 [18:14, LXX]), rendering them powerless so that they would commit sin.
5. Death overpowering (*katakurieuō*) humans (Ps. 49:11 [48:15, LXX]), rendering them powerless to live beyond the day of death's visit.
6. Adam ruling (*katakurieuō*) over God's creation (Sir. 17:4; cf. Gen. 1:28; 9:1; Ps. 72:8 [71:8, LXX]).
7. God exercising authority (*katakurieuō*) over a wayward son, rendering him powerless to continue in his wrong ways by making him obey (Jer. 3:14).
8. A demon-possessed man overpowering (*katakurieuō*) other humans (Acts 19:16), rendering them powerless to control him.

With the exception of the sixth occurrence, all other passages suggest that the one who *katakurieuō* another renders the latter powerless. This concept, it seems, informs us as to what Jesus was telling his disciples, namely, his followers should not be rendering others powerless by their manner of leadership. If this is so, then Jesus' command to his followers not to *katakurieuō* others simply means, to put it more positively, that his followers (especially those in leadership role) should be *empowering* others.

Jesus exemplified this by sending his disciples out, giving them authority to preach and heal (e.g., Matt. 10; Luke 9–10), *empowering* them by giving them opportunity to do as he did. No wonder Paul said that the main role of church leaders is to equip God's people for the work of service, *empowering* them to serve and not monopolizing the service to produce a personality-centered or pastor-centered congregation (Eph. 4:11–13). Having said these, one may conclude that true leadership is one that empowers others to serve.

Now we are ready for the application part. “Lording -it-over” someone is not really about being bossy or being a slave-driver, although these may be expressions of it, too. Pastors “lord-it-over” their congregations if they do not equip them to serve. They are monopolizing the ministry and producing congregations that are personality-centered. Senior pastors “lord-it-over” their associates if they do not allow them to

thrive by limiting their opportunities. Leaders “lord-it-over” their peers when their personal ambitions govern their activities to the point that they are ready to put others down in order to get ahead of the rest. Come to think of it, pride, insecurity, and selfishness are at the root of this kind of leadership. This is the way the world works, but Jesus' warning is clear, “... it should not be this way among you...”

