

9/25/22 - Acts 9:19-31 - "Supernatural Pragmatics"

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Date: 25 September 2022

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[0 : 0 0] We're going to be continuing in Acts chapter 9, picking back up in verse 20 and continuing on through verse 31. So I think we'll have it on the screen, but I encourage you to read along in your Bible.

I'll be reading from the ESV, but you can read in your translation. So starting in verse 20 of chapter 9, it says, And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogue, saying, He is the Son of God. And all who heard him were amazed and said, Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called upon his name?

And has he not come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests? But Saul increased all the more in strength and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ.

When many days had passed, the Jews plotted to kill him, but their plot became known to Saul, they were watching the gates day and night in order to kill him. But his disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a basket.

And when he had come to Jerusalem, he attempted to join the disciples, and they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord who spoke to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus.

[1 : 2 3] So he went in and out among them at Jerusalem, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord. And he spoke and disputed against the Hellenists, but they were seeking to kill him. And when the brothers learned this, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.

So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace, and was being built up, and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.

This is the word of the Lord. Here we go.

It's good to see everyone here today. Boy, it's been just a strange sixth season, hasn't it? This weird illness going around. I don't think it's the C word.

Well, I know the C word's going around, but I don't think that people have been sick with it as frequently as the cold or whatever's going. But our family is feeling better.

[2 : 3 4] We thank you for your prayers. Nobody likes a sick family full of four children under the age of 10 who are trying to make their concern known to their sick parents.

And so it's just a cycle of sickness going on. But we are all better. And my wife may be struggling about 70%, 80%, but we're all making it.

So thank you for your prayers during this time. And we are continuing here in chapter 9 of the book of Acts, our series in the book of Acts.

And while quite a journey that we have been on with the movement of the church in Jerusalem to the movement of the church outside Jerusalem, outside there to spread even further to some remote deserts among people of practicing sorcery, this has just been a wild ride.

Is this a movie yet? It should be a movie. This would keep people... I don't know who watches The Crown, but this has nothing against The Crown.

[3 : 55] This is something that can propel and root us as His church in such profound reality of what we believe is true. What we believe could not be stopped.

No matter what oppression came against God's promise, it remained true. It is certainly true even to this day. And so, I want to consider a word that we'll be studying, that I'm drawing out of the text today.

And it's a word known as pragmatism. Pragmatism. It's a word that describes a practical system.

Pragmatism. The word pragmatism is the root word. It means action. And ism, obviously, is a set of beliefs in philosophy. And it's a practice that's adhered to, to be an ism.

So, we've got pragmatism. It's a practical system that is considered to achieve a useful and certain end. That when you think this way, you do this so that this happens.

[5 : 11] And so, a pragmatist will easily accept a theory as true or useful in predicting the world. That there's certain result.

If you do A, B, C, you are certain to achieve X, Y, Z. Peter Pan reminds us in the Disney flick, right, that the moment you doubt whether you can fly, you cease forever to be able to do it.

That's a pragmatic belief. That if you doubt, you won't be able to. I often think that this might be the R. Kelly inspiration for his 90s hit, I believe I can fly.

He said, no, Peter Pan, I can fly, right? But we see that pragmatists view truth. Anything in life that's true, they view it in terms of what creates practical outcomes.

It's often an outcome that has seen results. Today, we see it all over, I don't know what the latest fad diet is, but don't talk to somebody who actually went to school for that because they will correct all these fad diets going around.

[6 : 21] We have some exercise science majors in the room right now who are just like, oh, yeah, whatever's next. It's just a repackaging of the Atkins diet from back in the 90s.

Man, I'm back in the 90s today. We'll just stay in the 90s. I like those times. And we got patented the fad diets. We have money-making schemes. We have MLMs, multi-level marketing schemes of making money.

But unfortunately, pragmatism also exists in the church. And specifically in the church, there are good and bad pragmatics.

But what makes a pragmatic bad, though? Because you could argue there are good pragmatics. Like if you preach the gospel, it's trusted that his word will save.

That's an outcome, the pragmatic belief. Or by assembling regularly as a church body, as Christians, not neglecting to meet together, that we are built up.

[7 : 26] We're sanctified in community. Isn't this a beautiful picture of that very thing? And when we do this regularly, we know that it is part of God's plan for us as a church.

But I believe what makes a pragmatic bad is when our methods replace God's methods. Or, to take it a little further, when God's methods are used as a method for an intended methodological end.

Methodological end. So, in fact, it's real today in the church. Sadly, if it were possible, if it were possible to remove the Holy Spirit's presence, if we would remove him from many churches today, they would continue to operate without missing a beat.

Because their operation was never dependent upon God or founded upon God in the first place. By leaning not on God's way, but attractional ways.

Ways to draw them in. Ways to feed them well. Theotainment, as some might put it. Jared Wilson, he's an author and a professor at one of our Midwestern seminaries in Kansas City.

[8 : 49] He has fantastic resources on the matter. Of him personally being a pragmatic church planter. And he admits to this day that he is a failed pragmatic church planter.

He did all the steps that were in the book by a bunch of guys who are 20 years younger than him that said, this is how you break the 200 mark in your church.

This is how you start a church. And it was all methods. And the opening day, nobody showed up to the church plant opening.

He followed every method and means. But those methods and means, apart from God's methods and means, are going to fall short. And he often uses those types of situations to humble us.

And a humbling read, if you want to read more into that, is the Gospel Driven Church by Jared Wilson. Gospel Driven Church, I would commend to you. The sermon today is somewhat within this realm of thinking pragmatically.

[9 : 55] But not in the natural realm of pragmatics. And when I say supernatural, I'm not talking about paranormal activity and all this weird ghostly stuff.

We're talking about things that counteract logical ends. That it makes no sense in the imagination how this end came to be.

Supernatural pragmatics. And we see that in this text. And I believe that the passage today will challenge us to keep the essential things essential.

According to God's Word. But how do we get here? We're in chapter 9. Did you know that there's some chapters before that? There are. There's eight of them. And all eight of them inform what chapter 9 is all about.

And guess what? Chapter 9 is going to actually inform what the next chapters are. Isn't that amazing? When we take God's Word within its context.

[11 : 02] And we're doing that today. But how did we get here? We have eight chapters that start out detailing Jesus Christ among the disciples. giving them a promise.

A promise that He would spread the gospel from Jerusalem, starting in Jerusalem, and would spread to the ends of the earth. The ends of the world.

And so the promise and many promises have been accounted for in these eight chapters. Promises of prevailing, promises of preserving, and promises of proclaiming in areas that would have never been imagined to receive the gospel.

A desert road or a sorcery-infested city like Samaria with Simon. Acts is a record of God's promises that are kept.

And in that, Luke provides a certain idea of the pragmatic means described in this early church. And it's a timeless truth. The passage today, church, is about how God builds His church using upside-down metrics for His upside-down kingdom.

[12 : 21] That is, He works through uncertain circumstances and uncertain people to bring about His certain plans and promises.

And we, as a church, are simply called to trust in His intended pragmatics. And so we're going to do that today.

We're going to look at this and how the passage unfolds. But before we do, I'd like to pray for our time because I am very dependent upon the Holy Spirit to use me well here within these 30 minutes.

So please join me in prayer. Father, humble us under Your mighty hands. Father, let Your Word reign supreme that we come under the authority of Your Word, that what we think we know, we count it as loss under Your mighty wisdom, Your divine wisdom and precepts in our lives.

Father, mold us and shape us today. However we came, let us leave changed. If we came a sinner, send us out a saint. Father, do Your work among Your people through Your Word.

[13 : 39] This is a pragmatic that we trust in right now. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. So, three sections today. We have a couple sections where I'm just going to title the section simply, What's Going On In That Passage?

With a couple points. Okay? So, just a couple things about what the passage is concerning. Because we see some patterns and I believe that we'll be able to see those patterns in full by the end of our time.

So, the first section is Saul's impression upon Damascus. And so, like any story, it's set up with a setting. It begins with a setting.

Once upon a time, right? And we have that very phrase, similar to that phrase. For some days, He was with the disciples at Damascus.

And immediately, He proclaimed Jesus in the synagogue, saying, He is the Son of God. Think about that. For some days. Those quick words don't really do justice to actually what took place here.

[14 : 49] These some days were weeks, months, years. He actually left Damascus, went away, and then came back. Galatians 1.16, He wrote to the Galatians saying that, I did not immediately consult with anyone.

He didn't get saved and go running to Peter and say, Check it out! I'm changed by the gospel! I'm one of you now! I'm an apostle!

I've been sent! He didn't care about that. For years, He spent away from Jerusalem. He did not immediately consult with anyone, verse 16 of Galatians 1.

Nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me. But I went into Arabia and returned again to Damascus. What did He do, though?

Immediately do. He immediately proclaimed Jesus Christ. He didn't proclaim that He's one of them.

[15 : 56] He proclaimed the one who matters most, Jesus Christ, the Son of God. What does He mean by that? He's the Messiah, the Savior, the long-awaited through these pages, the one who we've been looking for, the typological fulfillment of Moses, of Abraham, found within Jesus Christ.

This is the one. God and man, in flesh, held a unique standing with God. And this is the one of whom ushered in Saul's redemptive work.

He took His conversion and He went and proclaimed it. He could do nothing but proclaim it. You see, Saul's only concern was declaring the cross of Jesus Christ.

And Saul seems to have picked up where Stephen has left off, right? Isn't this remarkable? Just previously, Stephen was stoned to death with Saul applauding those who were throwing stones.

and Stephen put together this biblical, theological masterpiece of man's rejection of God's ways.

[17 : 14] And here, the one who is applauding is now pleading with others to come to Jesus Christ. This is amazing. And this makes me marvel for a moment because in the scope of God's sovereignty over His authority and control over all things, we see a whole lot of fulfilled prayer.

Yeah, God is sovereign and He works out His will according to His divine decree. And yeah, we can't really twist arm God.

Can't change His mind. He's immutable. But isn't it interesting how there's cyclical, fulfilled prayer. The apostles who were persecuted prayed for boldness.

What did they get? They got boldness. They asked for forgiveness. Stephen asked to forgive those who persecuted him. And guess what?

Saul forgiven. The one who was stoning. They were praying for opportunities to be opened up to proclaim the gospel.

[18 : 25] And what has happened? Opportunities have come. outside of Jerusalem. And we see the miraculous intervention of God in this life having to do with bound to the people's praying.

What an important aspect to see in this passage as we see this narrative unfolding. It's not explicit in this passage, but it's definitely the implicit undercurrent of this passage.

because all of which we're seeing right now has come through the currents of prayer. And so this brings us to the next, the first mix of responses.

People in Damascus. Saul's saved. He's proclaiming the word. He's going. He's telling it on the mountain. And those within his influence, they're amazed.

Verse 21, And all who heard him were amazed and said, Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called upon his name?

[19 : 32] And has he not come here for the purpose to bring them bound before the chief priests? Isn't that the man who was approving of Stephen's killing?

We probably should get out of here, guys, is what they're saying. No more listening to this madman. He belongs to be sitting in prison along Charles Manson.

This guy needs to be locked up and chained. He's an animal who needs to be imprisoned. We've got to be scared of this.

And this response is appropriate. Because I believe I've heard so many testimonies of people who have been saved from a history of drugs, of violence, tattooed in every place imaginable, piercings in every possible location, body modifications and everything.

And when they hear the gospel, they are internally changed. But what still exists? The impact of their past choices that have been made.

[20 : 42] They still live with the, like we mentioned last week, with the effect of their sin. Saul lived with this whole laundry list of why people should not encounter him.

He has given the world a reason not to ever accept him into the church. which we would lock the doors if we want to be honest, if Saul came knocking. Okay?

And so, we see that Saul had nothing to prove. But we, as the passage opened up, he had everything to proclaim.

He was not concerned about proving anything. But he proved one thing, verse 22, but Saul increased all more in strength and confounded, perplexed the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ.

He had nothing to prove to anybody else. He knew what God had done in his life regardless of what anybody thought or said. He knew who he belonged to. And so, his proving was that of Jesus Christ, not proving that he saved.

[21 : 50] And you see, Saul was strengthened in these three years in proclamation. Toward the end of the three years, you see that oppression served as a confirmation that, well, Saul, you've definitely made an impact here in Damascus and God's saying, it's time to go to the next mission.

And it came by way of opposition because Saul was not the fanboy of all. He got a following, but he wasn't the fanboy of all as we see in verse 23.

There is amazement, but there is also rejection and opposition. Verse 23, when many days had passed, the Jews plotted to kill him. Get rid of the problem.

That's how Saul used to operate, right? Verse 24, but their plot became known to Saul and they were watching the gates day and night in order to kill him.

Church, the hunter becomes the hunted. It's a complete earth shattering. reversal. But, glory to God, the disciples took him in verse 25 by night and led him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a basket.

[23 : 03] Damascus had this big wall around it and he was lowered down in a basket. And so, we see that the activity that's described through Saul's ministry is two components here.

Persuasion and persecution. His new identity led to new activity. Some were amazed, some hated him. Some loved him, some hated him.

Do you see that in the passage? He had fans and foes. But how does this translate in the eyes of the world when we're talking about pragmatics?

How does that translate in the eyes of the world? They would probably say, well, he had some success and he had some failure. Right?

He got some, but he couldn't get them all. Maybe if he was a little bit nicer. Didn't say that people were sinners. Nobody wants to hear that.

[24 : 07] If you want to fill a synagogue, don't tell them they're sinners. Tell them they're special. Give them a book that you title The Power of I Am. Right?

Give it to them. Let them feel special and make their declarations of self-righteousness. That's not how he won them. The world will often see what happened here as success and failure.

But here, we see that success and failure are not and should not ever be a part of our Christian language.

And this is why. Because there's just obedience and disobedience. Paul, Saul at this time, was obedient.

And come what may, he remained obedient. obedience. Regardless of those who came, regardless of those who left, regardless of the, the, how many fans he gathered or how many people were picking up their stones trying to kill him.

[25 : 14] Imagine what's going on. He's literally being hunted. People are watching for this man to come out of Damascus. Day and night, Luke says, they are hunting him.

This is a manhunt. As a pastor, it's challenging not to fall for church growth gimmicks. I honestly get emails probably once a week minimum of some 20-year-old telling me how to break the 200 mark in the church.

How to do it right. Right? The church is never meant to be a business. It's a kingdom.

This is a kingdom. We're a part of the master's kingdom. The king rules an upside-down kingdom. And the world's methods and means and all their ideas, while they can draw a lot of people, it doesn't define a church.

He rules an upside-down kingdom. He uses the weak to be strong. He calls the first to be last. He calls the humble to be bold.

[26 : 33] This is an upside-down kingdom. There is no success or failure in the church. There is only obedience and disobedience. And we see that in the passage. We also see something interesting, a little subtly so far, is another component is that Saul gave the Corinthian church a little bit insight into what his emotional state was in his proclamation.

What was going on in his heart? What was going on in his mind? Was he nervous? Was he trembling? You wouldn't imagine that from the text of what we read here.

But he writes to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians chapter 2 verse 3, and I was with you in weakness fear and much trembling.

And my speech and my message were not plausible words of wisdom. Self-help, nine steps to a better you. That's not in there, but that's my little commentary.

But it continues, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that, verse 5, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

[27 : 50] The church's boldness is a gift of God to the weak. Boldness is a gift of God to the weak.

And yes, we play a role in God's sovereignty. Yes, at this little blip in history, I'm standing here proclaiming at this pulpit, somebody will take my place after me and somebody after him, and after and so on and so forth.

I'm just a blip. And yeah, God is sovereign. He uses the weak to be bold, but how could we ever think that we're God's gift to Christianity? That, boy, I'm so glad that the church has me.

Boy, they would be lost without me. Wow. That's not whatever took place in the early church.

And sad badly happens with many celebrity pastors in our day-to-day. We are not God's gift to Christianity. God uses the weak.

[28 : 57] So this can challenge us to cut our pride of who we think that we are. To be weak. If that's a pragmatic to being obedient, so be it. Let us be weak for Jesus Christ.

God's gift to Christ. If we want to be strong, we've got to be weak. So we see the passage continue into section two.

We see that Paul's impression becomes known in Jerusalem as well. He, after some times of years, he goes out and returns to Jerusalem.

and we see insight of what that entailed. Some similarities, some differences. We're going to observe them. And so the narrative continues in verse 26, and when he had come to Jerusalem, he attempted to join the disciples. After three years, Paul arrives, right? He returns the way that he left. He left persecuted, or he left as a persecutor and returned as one persecuted, completely flipped around. And this brings about sort of this mixed response. Notice Paul gets somewhere, and Luke is saying, look at the people around him, how they respond. The same thing happens in this section as well. He gets there, and look how they respond, another mixed emotion. They had fear and skepticism.

The disciples, and verse 26 continues, and they all were afraid of him, and they did not believe that he was a disciple. We got a mole here, they thought. This guy's an imposter. He's just trying to, you know, like every action-packed movie, he's a double agent. He's come to infiltrate the walls so that he can take us out at the heart. I've watched too many Marvel movies. You can tell. That's the narrative.

[31 : 05] But Barnabas, verse 27 says, took him and brought him to the apostles and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord who spoke to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus. Luke contrasts the fear of Saul among the Jewish people with the fear of the Jewish people.

We see fear of man and fear of God. And Luke calls for even another illustration, Barnabas.

This isn't the first time we've seen Luke use Barnabas as an illustration of something. Barnabas not only served as an example of selflessness from back in Acts 4, verse 36. Remember the things that he sold. There was charity among everyone, and he sold all this stuff.

He was selfless. And Luke recalls him once again as another example of selflessness. Barnabas. In the contrast with the fear and skepticism. Honestly, a minute away from the sermon, I really believe that Barnabas is an unsung hero in the book of Acts. Okay, that's my soapbox.

We'll go back now. But Barnabas, at some point, as the passage insinuates, Barnabas took Saul, this man that he was probably an arm's length away. He probably greeted Saul with a hug, took him in, probably to his home. Inside of his home, probably provided hospitality, probably similar to that which would happen in the family when he was blinded.

[33 : 07] And Saul inquired. He heard and believed the testimony of what happened radically in Saul's life on the road to Damascus. When Jesus Christ himself, the resurrected person who hung dead on the cross, who was raised from the tomb and ascended in heaven, he saw that one. Him. Holes in his wrist and ankles. He saw him. And he shared with Barnabas about this. And once convinced, Barnabas then acts as a selfless mediator between Saul and the apostles. I love Barnabas. Verse 28, so Saul, after convincing the apostles of Saul's conversion and life change, Saul went in and out in verse 28 among them at Jerusalem, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord. And once again, in Damascus-like fashion, Saul gets busy.

What does he do? Go and tell people that he's saved, he's changed, and everything like that? No, he's preaching the gospel. And that's not to undermine us sharing our testimonies. That's not what I'm saying at all. But what his attitude and what this is entailing was a pragmatic end of the church being built. And Saul got busy to that end. And he's proclaiming the gospel immediately, preaching in the name of the Lord, verse 28 says. And verse 29, similar to what happened in Damascus, he spoke, he disputed with the Hellenists. Here he goes again, talking about sin again. That's Saul, right?

Verse 29, but they were seeking to kill him. Look what happened. Saul, you ruined it. The same guys, the Hellenist Jews, these were Jews from the diaspora. They were like the suspicious Jewish people. They weren't natives of Palestine. They were the outside Jews. And they were the same ones that ultimately stoned Stephen. And we see that his once friends become foes and not just want to kick him out, but want to take the breath out of his lungs because of his proclamation.

You see the activity, just like we just saw in Damascus. Saul was involved in persuasion, in proclamation. His new identity led to new activity, but wait.

There's something different here in Jerusalem. Luke is emphasizing something. That Saul indeed was obedient from every angle. And the additional component here is that this pattern includes fear.

[36 : 10] The aspect of fear. The aspect of fear is literally mixed in this as like a sharp note within a symphonic melody. You hear this like fear, and you sense this note being repeated over and over again in the passage. And it's like, ooh, what's that there for? In other words, the church isn't just weak.

The church isn't just obedience. The church had fear. Fearful of the right things. Fear of God. Fear that is reverent of who God is and His holiness. Those in Jerusalem were in fear. And Barnabas, arguably, probably too. I mean, it takes some guts to do what he did.

One feared man. One feared man. One feared God. Even Saul was fearful and trembling with the Corinthian church. The church, there's something that this passage should encourage us all with, is that we may fear man. A lot of times. We will fear man. And that inherently is natural, especially if you struggle in mental health, like I do with anxiety. Like often, sometimes with depression, depression, these things can really cripple you. It almost paralyzes you to move.

But what makes the difference, though, when we do fear, when we do experience anxiety, is what we do with that in comparison to the superseding fear of a holy God and what His desire is for us to do.

Saul, his fear may have been prevalent, but he was quickly refocused to the task that God set before him. You see, the church must fearfully engage the world, allowing the fear of God to disproportionately overcome the fear of man. One is going to win that battle, and the fear of God ought to always triumph over our fear of man. Amen? The consequence of our obedience will never outweigh the consequence of our disobedience. It is telling of what we worship is true or that which is false. True worship or idolatry, essentially. And so, it comes to a close. Saul escapes not in a basket being lowered from the walls of Damascus, but when the brothers learned this, verse 30, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus. Based upon the message and the passage up to this point, we receive insight into the mixed responses, the results of the mixed responses, the results of the mission of the church proclaiming Jesus Christ. We have obedience, we have weakness, we have fear. And upon these premises,

[39 : 36] Luke describes in this, like, it's like this emphasis that Luke is pushing us forward in the passage to see something here. Based on what happened in Damascus, he gets to verse 31 to explain something.

Upon these premises, obedience, weakness, and fear, Luke describes the paradoxical prevailing of the church. The triumph of the church, all pressing towards verse 31, which is a summary statement, and in which we see the third section today, and the emphasis of the passage, the church's impression upon the world. Look at this beautiful summary statement, along with the many other summary statements in the book of Acts that drive the content. Verse 31, so the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up and walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.

What is the results of the book of Acts thus far? Well, first of all, it's pretty much straight to the point. These churches had peace. I didn't know that that was so possible. It's like we're constantly striving for peace, for us to throw our arms around each other and be like, I don't care if you want the carpet and the paint to be blue, but I love you anyways. And all these little things, politics can divide us. What this church had was peace. That was an attribute of the early church.

something that some churches don't even know is possible. We may experience uncontrollable opposition outside of these walls as an illustration, but we know how we can achieve peace within these walls. I'll tell you what, it has something to do with being obedient, with being weak, and fearing God.

Supernatural pragmatics. This peace derives from a right relationship with God. What does this look like? It says that there was peace established between sinful, wretched human beings, and the cross has atoned for that sin and the penalty of that sin. So that person may be transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light. This is where peace is made between God and man through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, where our sin was atoned for. And this peace that we have with Jesus Christ guides our relationships with one another, does it not? Obediently, humbly, devoutly, prayerfully, independently. Peace in the church has everything to do with unity in hearts, the condition of our hearts.

[43 : 11] And a church filled with humble hearts will be built up. It's true for them then. It's true for us now. This is spiritual pragmatic. And the second thing that we see is the results of what has taken place is that they walked hand in hand. One hand, they had fear of God, and the other hand, for the comfort of the person of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit's a person. It's not a force.

I don't care how many Star Wars movies you watch. It's not a force. It's a person. Okay? Knock it off. So walking hand in hand with the fear of the Lord and the person of the Holy Spirit who brought comfort.

This is directly in reference to the promise unfolding from Acts 1.8 of the spread of the church and the gospel spreading, the witness spreading from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. And Luke makes it clear that the church continued to walk in the fear of the Lord and the comfort of the Holy Spirit.

This is such a vital component to see how their obedience and their weakness and their fear actually played out. It was not walking in the confidence of believing in yourself, making your daily declarations of I am chosen, getting all riled up in the mirror like a pep rally every single time you use the toilet. It's not walking in the confidence of believing in yourself. It's not walking in the power of you.

It's not pulling up your bootstraps, you Christian, and sucking it up buttercup. If times get hard, you get moving. No. Fear and comfort. Not crippling fear, but a fear that we find our greatest comfort in.

[45 : 11] A fear that keeps in perspective the dreaded underbelly within relational church life. Amid an oppressive world. And yes, the church had peace and was being built up through the unstoppable word of God, the power of proclamation, but don't forget this internal unseen to the eye of man fear of God and comfort of the Holy Spirit. Don't forget that. Supernatural pragmatics are not simply focused on external engagement of drawing the people in and looking at these crowds coming and filling the baptismal up.

While all those are good things, it doesn't define a church. But rather, supernatural pragmatics are focused on internal engagement. What's going on inside this ticker?

You see, the condition of our heart has much to do with this movement. It is true for them then. It is true for us now today. Why would Luke record all this? Why? Why would he impress upon verse 31 as sort of like the emphasis? Why would he write in such a way? You have to remember that he wrote his Gospel of Luke as the first volume of a second volume to a man named Theophilus who was interested in a detailed, ordered collection of what is going on with this church. Don't forget about what went on with that church and what that means for us today. Luke provides the needed insight to testify why the church couldn't be stopped. Why no hand could come against the church and destroy the movement.

If the church was obedient, they remain weak, being built up, multiplying. It was due to God, not man. This is a transcendent truth. So, as we close and land the plane, I would like us to consider that this should absolutely kill our pride. Any sense of your imagination or your belief, regardless of its subjective experience, there's an objective truth that we are nobodies.

And it is important for us to remember that. And if God is calling us to something that doesn't make sense, so be it. It is obedience or disobedience. Let's be honest for a moment. Don't we desire as a church to have a summary statement like this set of Steel Valley Church?

[48 : 08] We were built up. We had peace. We were multiplying. There are all these Steel Valley churches. Maybe not. I don't like campus stuff. That's my soapbox. But I think that that's important to be multiplying. For this body to go and plant another church. Wouldn't that be amazing to see?

Amazing indeed. So many desire those things, but disregard the process of which God brings them about. He brings it about selflessness. We miss the greatest enemy in our sanctification being that person that we're making those daily declarations in the mirror to. We are our own worst enemies in our sanctification. We are fickle. We are selfish. Let me take ownership of my statements and not be so brash on you. I am fickle. Selfish. I daily have to die to my flesh. And so do each and every one of us.

How the story would be different if God didn't humble Saul in blindness. He called him, gave him the sword, and said, Go, mighty man. Maybe gave him a trouble-free evangelistic effort in Damascus and Jerusalem. And they raise him up above their... Peter and John are his biggest fanboys. They get the shirt that says Saul on it with the number on the back. And they get the pom-poms waving. Saul! Saul! Saul! How the story would be different if all that took place? Right? And it's happening in the church nearby. It's sad.

Our role, church, is to assemble under the headship of Christ as temples, building blocks of the living God in the power of the Holy Spirit. God is doing great things through this church, and I can only expect them to increase and multiply, but it's going to take selflessness. It's going to take weakness. It is going to take obedience. And if it comes to pass, praise God. If not, praise God. Because we don't live under a metric of success or failure. We can leave our man-made tactics and self-help horoscope declarations at the door and carry with us the fellowship of the Holy Spirit that strengthens our weakness, reorients what we determine as success, and keeps us humble in the fear of God. We are ambassadors of His mission. We herald His message, and we would do quite well to remain steadfastly humble in His pursuits. Amen. Let's pray.