

God's Agenda for Church Growth

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Preacher: Jim Masters

[0:00] If you would take your Bibles and go to the book of Acts chapter 9.

If you're visiting with us, you can pull out that black Bible in the chair in front of you and go towards the back and find page 99 for Acts chapter 9.

Page 99 in that black Bible, Acts chapter 9. I'm going to start in the second part of verse 19 through verse 31 this morning.

Acts 9, 19 through 31. I'm just going to look at this morning. I'll read and then we'll start our study.

There in the middle part of verse 19. Now for several days, Saul was with the disciples who were at Damascus.

[1:12] And immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogue saying, He is the Son of God. And all those hearing him continued to be amazed and were saying, Is this not he who came in Jerusalem?

Sorry. Is this not he who in Jerusalem destroyed those who called on this name? And I come here for the purpose of bringing them bound before the chief priests? But Saul kept increasing in strength and confounding the Jews who lived at Damascus by proving that this one is the Christ. And when many days had elapsed, the Jews plotted together to do away with him. But their plot became known to Saul. And they were also watching the gates day and night so that they might put him to death.

But his disciples took him, took him by night and let him down through the wall, lowering him in a large basket. And when he had come to Jerusalem, he was trying to associate with the disciples. And they were all afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took hold of him and brought him to the apostles and described to them how he had seen the Lord on the road and that he had talked to him and how at Damascus he had spoken out boldly in the name of Jesus.

[2:28] He was with them moving about freely in Jerusalem, speaking out boldly in the name of the Lord. And he was talking and arguing with the Hellenistic Jews, but they were attempting to put him to death. But when the brethren learned of it, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him away to Tarsus.

So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace being built up. And going on in the fear of the Lord and the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase.

When I first came to, at that time, First Southern Baptist Church, it will be nine years in October, this coming October, I was asked by a former deacon, who's no longer here, what was my goal?

What was my purpose? What's your purpose? What's your goal? What are you going to do? What was my agenda? I told him the four Ps.

Three, two, three, four. The four Ps. Preach, pray, to develop personal relationships, and be patient.

[3:42] He said, no, no, no, no. What's your goal? What's your agenda? What are you going to accomplish? What's your purpose? I said to preach, pray, to develop personal relationships, and be patient.

I don't think he was expecting that, nor do I think he thought that that's what I should be doing, but it didn't really go well. I don't know, maybe there's another agenda I was supposed to have.

You know, a few weeks ago, we actually looked at God's strategy for planting new churches. Well, today, we're going to look at God's agenda, God's goal, God's plan, for church growth.

Today, we're going to see God's agenda, for church growth. God's agenda, for church growth. How do you grow a church numerically?

How do you grow a church spiritually and numerically? How do you do that? I mean, trust me, I know how I can get numbers. When I was doing junior high ministry, we used to play YouTube videos, and used to have them skate inside the area, and just kind of have a 10 minute message,

and then they did a lot of games.

[5:02] I mean, you can do that. I mean, I know how to get numbers in. I've done it before. Back in the 80s, we did that. Early 90s, I should say. But that's not God's agenda, isn't it?

At least, I don't think so. When we look at the text, verses 19 to 31 of chapter 9, we actually see God's agenda, to bring about church growth.

There's five. And they go in this order. Transformation, proclamation, opposition, preservation, multiplication.

Like the little shun words? That's kind of cool, huh? I didn't come with that myself, so don't give me credit. Transformation, proclamation, opposition, preservation, multiplication.

Now later on, I'm going to give these to you, so if you're trying to write them down, don't worry, you'll get them later. You've got transformation, proclamation, opposition, preservation, multiplication.

[6:09] That's the order that it goes. Now let me give it to you, in two statements. One's a shorter statement, another's a longer statement. Transformation, initiates proclamation. Proclamation, triggers opposition.

Amid the opposition, God graces us, with his preservation, and all of these, cause multiplication. That's what you see, in the text. The transformation, that God brings about, that initiates, proclaiming.

And that proclamation, is going to trigger opposition, but in the midst of that opposition, God gives us grace, with preservation, and all of these, cause the multiplication, of the church. Now I'll give you, a longer statement.

When God changes us, He makes us, passionate proclaimers, of His gospel. Yet this proclamation, always brings opposition. But in the midst, of the opposition, God sustains us, by His grace, and multiplies the church.

And just, as a side note, the opposition, when we see from the text, is opposition to the gospel, to proclaim the gospel, but also, an opposition, is just trials in general. Sickness, cancer, accidents, things like that.

[7:30] Okay, so, kind of expand that out, that opposition. Opposition. Opposition. So this is God's agenda. This is how He's going to do it. This is how He does it.

You see, automatically, Saul begins to fulfill, the calling that the Lord Jesus, gives to him. The calling from verses 15 and 16, that we looked at last week. And it didn't take long, for him to get himself in trouble.

Saul, who will become Paul, loves to get himself in trouble. Because he keeps talking about this Jesus stuff. He became controversial.

And a broad opposition. He was preaching Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God. Which is admitting Jesus' deity. And that he was God's chosen one.

Saul grew in his proclamation, the gospel, the Holy Spirit. And though he faced opposition, he faithfully proclaimed the truth. Now, how did Saul come to know the truth?

[8:41] I mean, what factors were involved in that? Well, the fact of Jesus' resurrection, you go to the tomb, and there wasn't any body there. No body there. I just thought of that.

It's kind of funny. Did you get that? No body, nobody, no body. That was kind of funny. I just did that. That's kind of for free. You don't have to pay for that one. The appearances to many of Jesus' disciples, that probably contributed to it.

The visible presence of the church. And the message of the Old Testament. How the Lord God, from Genesis chapter 3, had promised the Messiah to come.

There's a salvation, the redemption of his people. And that's the fulfillment. Jesus is the fulfillment. And of course, of course, the planting of the seed from Stephen's message and his murder.

What did we say last week about Stephen? He did not die, what? In vain. Stephen did not die in vain.

[9:44] He did not. Friends, listen. When we think about successful evangelism, what do we think about? The people coming forward.

That's what we think of. But successful evangelism is not about getting a person to pray the sinner's prayer or walk the aisle of a church service. It's giving the gospel to a person.

That is successful evangelism. We're just messengers. We let God do the growing.

Successful evangelism cannot be defined by numbers, but by getting the gospel right. You got to get the gospel right.

You got to tell them that God is a holy, just, and righteous God. He's your creator and you should be worshipping Him every moment of every single day. Well, I can't do that.

[10:49] Exactly. Because we're lawbreakers. We're sinners. But God is gracious and compassionate sending His Son, Jesus, living perfectly, dying on the cross, resurrecting from the dead.

Repent and trust in Christ alone. That's the gospel. Get the gospel right. That's successful evangelism. I just successfully evangelized you.

Well, that's kind of cool. Let's close in prayer and go home. No, come on. I can do that. And what I do this all for. God, yet, God will still bless the speaking of His gospel word.

But blessing it His way on His terms. Did you get that? You get the gospel right. And God will still bless the speaking of His gospel.

But He's going to bless it His way on His terms. Not yours. Not mine. Not by healing you of cancer.

[11:57] Maybe. Not by taking away that pain. Maybe. Not by taking away the hostility of that person who hates you and can't stand to be around you.

Like Chris and Jerome. He doesn't like us. My Chris loves me. Chris, there, he hates me.

That won't go away. Not necessarily. So it's going to come His way on His terms. And yet, understand this, brethren, God continues to do His work through Jesus in His Spirit.

He continues to work through Jesus in His Spirit. That's good, right? That's good. Let's unpack this now.

This passage here. I'll give you the first couple points. You actually see these together. I think it's important for us to see these together. Transformation and proclamation. Transformation and proclamation.

[13:03] We'll hit 19 through 22 and then we'll drop to 26 through 29. Okay? 19 through 22, first 19 through 20, for several days Saul was with the disciples at Damascus.

Immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues. He's the Son of God. He's going to many synagogues there in Damascus speaking the truth about Jesus.

As the Son of God, a truth he would repeat in his church letters, Jesus is the unique, chosen, promised one of God.

And the amazing part about this, he spoke without apostolic approval. Oh my goodness, could he, can he do that? I mean, is that legal? Oh goodness. Yes, it's legal. That's okay.

And when he says here he is the Son of God, I just wanted to unpack this a little bit. When we say Son of God, we mean God the Son, the second person of the Trinity.

[14:10] We believe in one God, he's three persons. The resurrected Jesus demonstrates that he shares God's rule as judge and savior. In fact, he's resurrected.

It demonstrates. He shares the rule of God the Father. There's one God. We believe in one God. Not three. He's not different manifestations.

That's important. If you believe that he's different manifestations, he manifests himself as a father, he manifests himself as a son, and then he manifests himself as the Holy Spirit, then you don't believe in the Trinity.

You're a modalist. Which is old school Pentecostals. You're a modalist. We don't believe that.

And there's not three different gods. We ain't Mormons here, people. There's not LDS stuff. He's God, he's God, he's God. There's not three gods. There's one God, three persons.

[15:12] And that's odd. Because Daniel's one being, Daniel's one person. Ward is one being, Ward is one person.

God, he's one being, he's three persons. That's how it works. And it's important that we get that right.

When we were on vacation, my older boys and I, back up, my sister-in-law said, hey, the youth and our kids, they're going to go to Great America.

It's like a theme park in Santa Clara, south of San Jose. It's big rides like Six Flags type stuff. And she says, hey, we'll pay for your tickets, you guys want to go. We're like, hey, all right.

We'll go. They got real big rides, blah, blah, blah. Well, there's one ride, it used to be called Top Gun, remember the movie Top Gun? It was like, it's a really cool ride. Now they call it like Flight Deck, I think.

[16:13] That's dumb. Anyways, dumb name. It used to be called Top Gun. Well, it was closed that morning. That's like one of the first rides we wanted to go on. So, oh, it was closed. So we went

to different rides and we're waiting all day.

Well, around in the afternoon somewhere, it opened. So it was great. So we got to go on the ride. Then we were going on it a second time. Going on it a second time a little bit in line. As we're walking up to go back in line, there's this kid, he was talking to his mom in Arabic.

And so we're going on and he gets on behind us in line. So I start talking to him. I said, hey, what dialect of Arabic are you speaking? And he said, Palestinian.

I said, really? So I said, well, when did you come? Well, my parents came here, blah, blah. So we start talking, you know, this and that. And then I asked him later on, I said, now, do you have to become a Muslim?

He says, no, I don't have to, but I want to because of this and that, blah, blah, blah. So we start talking about that. And then somehow in the conversation he said, I talked about, I'm a Christian.

[17:18] I'm like, are you familiar with Christians? Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, sure, sure. Oh, by the way, his name was Safe. I said, what's your name? He said, Safe. He's all, like, you know, Safe in baseball, he said. It was kind of funny. You know, Safe. Oh, okay, that's, okay, Safe, I get it.

So anyway, so, I said, you know about Christians? Oh, yeah, I have, I said, you have friends in high school there, from school that are Christians? Yeah, I have friends that are Christians. He said, yeah, they're Christians, you know, they celebrate Christmas and Easter.

And I said, well, Safe, there's some people who aren't Christians yet, they still celebrate Easter and Christmas. Oh, oh, okay, I understand. I understand what you mean. And I, then I started telling him, I said, you understand what, what Christians mean about Jesus being the Son of God?

He said, well, I don't remember how he responded, but I explained to him. Because, Muslims believe, that God, had relations with Mary, and that's how Jesus came.

They believe that you believe that. That's what they think you think. As the Trinity. So I told him, I said, we don't, we don't believe that. We believe that, Jesus is the eternal Son of God.

[18:27] He's always been the Son. And there's not three gods. There's only one God. We believe there's only one God like you do. But he's three distinct persons. There's God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit.

I said, do you understand that, Safe? He said, no, I understand. I understand what you're saying.

And then, it's from that point, I gave him the Gospel. We're sitting there about to go on the ride together, and I talked to him about Christ, and gave him the Gospel.

And we rode on the ride together. He was on one side, and over here. And then, went our separate ways, and said goodbye to him, and that was it. So I say that to you, that when you are giving someone the Gospel, part of what we have to do, is talk to them about, who is Jesus?

And here we see, Saul was proclaiming, Jesus is the Son of God. He is God the Son, the second person of the Trinity. Now let me say something else.

And I want to say this graciously to us. Friends, if we call ourselves Christians, then that means that we are commissioned, to speak the Gospel. To verbalize and express our faith.

[19:33] If we don't, it's doubtful whether we know Him. There's no such thing as a silent Christian. You're either a speaking Christian, or you're no Christian at all.

You're either proclaiming the Gospel, or you're proclaiming something else. Which should delineate who you really are. And friends, understand, that that's why the first word is important, in this point. Transformation. God has transformed me. God has changed me. God has regenerated me. God has changed my will and my heart.

Oh, I just love, I want to speak to you, about this great news. God has been so gracious to us, in the Lord Jesus Christ, by saving us.

And this grace should be the motivation, for speaking the good news to others. I mean, did you not hear that, when you read, 1 Timothy chapter 1.

[20:43] Where Paul says, Christ Jesus came into the world, to save sinners, I'm the worst. I was a blasphemer, I was a persecutor, and yet he saved me. I'm just going to, proclaim it man.

That's the way we should be. That transformation in your heart, should ignite a flame in you, that you will speak the Gospel.

You will tell people the Gospel. It's not because you have to. It's because you want to.

It's not because, oh, I've got to do this. The pastor's talking about them, making me feel guilty now.

No, it's because you want to. You have a desire to.

That Hispanic neighbor, down the street from you, that relative that you know, who needs to hear the Gospel. That sibling of yours. Your parents. Your kids.

[21:47] Your grandkids. Who is it? Notice back to our passage, in verse 21. All those who are hearing him, continue to be amazed.

They're saying, is this not the guy? Wait a second. The crowd was shocked. Isn't this that crazy dude, persecutor guy? From Jerusalem? He destroyed those, who called on his name, and he had come here, for the purpose of bringing them, bound before the chief priests.

Wasn't he coming here, to get other, followers of Jesus, and take them to chief priests? The ones who are going to arrest, believers, was now preaching Jesus, in the synagogues.

This is amazing. They're shocked. Maybe news about Saul, had reached Damascus. His reputation preceded him, maybe. But we see here, their greatest rival, was now their greatest ally.

And they were dazed. And friends, that's what our city community, should see, and us, should say about us. Wow!

[22:58] Those people, they're for real. I mean, those people of Cottonwood Bible Church, they're for real, man. They're just different people. I mean, they're kind of creepy, with that Jesus guy type thing.

But I mean, they're for real people. They really, they really, they really, live that out. They really talk about that. Does our community, say that about us? They say that about you.

And notice verse 22, Paul, Saul, excuse me, I don't want to say that. It's not Paul yet, it's Saul. We'll start calling him Paul, in chapter 14. Saul, kept increasing his strength, and confounding the Jews, who lived in Damascus.

Proving, demonstrating, this one, he's the Christ. He's getting stronger. Wiser, in proclaiming the gospel, to the Jews. He proved Jesus, was the Christ, God's Messiah.

By the way, the Jews, it's the first time, you see that word appear, in the book of Acts. You'll see it more often. Saul, notice he was, fearless, and bold, in his proclamation, of the Lord Jesus.

[24:03] And these Jews, were baffled, that Saul was proving, from the Old Testament, that Jesus was the Messiah. Kind of like, his old friend, Stephen. Showing, from the Old Testament, Jesus is the Messiah.

Showing, from Genesis, chapter 3. Keep in mind, Christianity, is the oldest religion, there is. When somebody, tells you otherwise, they don't understand. Because, Christianity is just, the fulfillment of what, God promised, in the beginning of time.

So it goes all the way, back to Genesis, chapter 3. When men fell, when, Eve, and Adam, fell, God promised, a savior, a redeemer, to come.

And Jesus, is the fulfillment of that. Christianity, is just the fulfillment, of Judaism. So here is Saul, preaching this, to people. And friends, look, as you are evangelizing, as you are proclaiming, because God has transformed you, look, it's one thing to read about evangelism, in a book, it's something totally different, when you actually do it yourself.

You just gotta go do it. It's almost like, a skill that can be developed, as you practice more, and more. And you might say, well I, that's what it sounds like, when I'm giving somebody, the gospel.

[25:23] Blah, blah, blah, blah, right? You kind of feel like that, maybe, right? I botched up my words, Jesus, he died, for sinners. Yeah, I know.

That's how I could get out, right? Maybe? Are you thinking that? Look, don't worry. The power's not in you. The power's not in you anyways. What do we believe?

1, 1, 6, Romans, 1, 1, 6. For I am not ashamed of what? The gospel. For, it is what? The power of God.

The power's not in you. The power's not in your good words. The power's not in your good looks.

For some of us, it's a good thing. Some of us don't have any hair.

We don't look good. Right? So the power's not in that. The power's in the gospel. The power's in the truth of the gospel. Not in you. Now we're dropping to verse 26, notice.

[26:27] When you come to Jerusalem, he's trying to associate with the disciples. Hey guys, what's going on? Who the heck are you? No. Get away from me. No way. And we're all afraid of him, not believing he was a disciple.

In Galatians chapter 1, at that time, now he's called Paul, Paul wrote that he actually went to Arabia for three years. So if, before he came to Damascus.

So if he actually went to Arabia for three years, then came to Damascus. And then he comes to Jerusalem. So for three years, they don't hear about him. And all they know is that, hey, this guy was a persecuted nutcase type dude.

And then he's coming back, he's trying to associate with us. They had no idea what's going on. They're like, no way. Which is kind of sad that they doubted God's power to transform Saul. I mean, what an amazing transformation that took place in Saul. Friends, let's be careful that we don't doubt God's power to save someone.

[27 : 33] Anyone. Or his power to keep transforming us. Any of us Christians. Any of us of his followers. I mean, you're struggling with depression, anger, sex, addictions, money, food, those things.

I mean, what did they do in the first century? They didn't write them off to a psychologist and let them go to that person, did they? And there's no such thing. No, that's because the Word is sufficient.

God's Word is sufficient. God's Word is power. So notice what happens though.

Praise God for a guy like Barnabas, 27. But Barnabas took hold of him. Literally, took Saul under his wing. Barnabas was gracious with his resources and he's just gracious with people.

Took Saul under his wing, brought him to the apostles, told him about what happened to him, how he saw the Lord, he had talked with the Lord, and how he spoke openly, literally fearlessly, the good news in Damascus.

[28 : 42] Barnabas. It was only a guy like Barnabas who could do something like this. To bring the church to the place where they could put aside their fears and trust God.

Trust Saul and then trust God. I mean, what an example of grace in Barnabas. Here's a guy who exemplified church unity and horizontal reconciliation.

Barnabas was just one of those guys, he's a really cool guy. He's just so gracious with people and just compassionate with them. That's the kind of guy Barnabas was.

So he's telling them about this. He talked to the Lord. Damascus, he's speaking out freely, fearlessly in the name of Jesus. Oh, by the way, these are marks of true deacons.

They care for the needs of members. They're the cheerleaders. And they maintain unity in the church. That's a deacon for you. Barnabas was a real example of a deacon who served the body.

[29 : 53] That's somebody who's a deacon. They're just cheerleaders. And they're gracious with people. And they care for their needs. And they help maintain that unity. That's Barnabas.

Totally Barnabas. Then notice, 28, he was with them, living about freely in Jerusalem, speaking out fearlessly in the name of the Lord.

And he was talking and arguing with the Hellenistic Jews. He began ministering there in Jerusalem. Saul was. And on his campaign, he ran to some old friends.

The Hellenistic Jews, his buddies, who helped put Stephen to death. Notice it says, he spoke and argued with them boldly.

Which will end up leading us to our next point. But I want to first say this. When God transforms a person, that one will proclaim Jesus Christ. That's why those two words are important to go together.

[30 : 50] Transformation, he's the proclamation. So get the first word first. That has to come first. Proclamation, proclamation, proclamation.

Then you feel guilty. No. We go back to transformation. God's grace, his grace compels you. There's no guilt in that, right? No guilt in that.

So his grace compels you to speak. But when you speak, realize that there will be opposition. 23 to 25, then we'll drop down to verse 29 to 30.

23. So here's Saul back in Damascus. We're back in Damascus. Many days, many days had lapsed. And by the way, maybe this is that three year time period.

The many days that could be at this point. The Jews plotted together to do away with him. But their plot became known to Saul. And they were also watching the gates day and night so that they might put him to death.

[31 : 52] But the disciples took him by night. And he went down through the wall lowering him in a large basket. The Jews weren't going to put up with this clown. No way.

And not only was he making them look bad and blasphemy, but he also used to be one of them. He used to be one of us. Now you're a traitor. So now they're really against him with full hostility.

They wanted him dead. But Saul got wind of their plot. Interesting how through his ministry there in Damascus, who knows for how long he was there in Damascus, but in his ministry of Damascus he obtained his own group of disciples.

That's kind of cool. So the Jews, they're watching the city gates to see him when you go in or go out. So they're watching day and night. His disciples let him down in a basket. The wall there of the city, the windows weren't that big.

They're probably pretty small. So he put them in a basket and they're letting him down. Can you imagine that? And you're not talking, you know, like five feet. I mean, it could be like 50 feet down. So here's to let him down for a rope with the basket and he's in the basket.

[33:01] And he could tip over and fall 50 feet to his death. Interesting too, we learn later from 2 Corinthians chapter 11 that the ether, excuse me, the ethnarch under King Aristus also had it out for him.

King Aristus there in Damascus. So political figures as well as the Jews wanted him dead. Oh, he had friends all over the place, didn't he? But this threat of death didn't faze Saul.

He committed his life to the Lord and would trust in his plan for him, life or death. Friends, when the gospel brings opposition, it should lead to fearless proclamation as well as real, solid church growth, which we'll see in a moment.

So do we want to grow as a church? We proclaim the gospel and it brings opposition. Whether it's the killing or the persecution, it could be sickness, tribulation, trials.

Opposition will come, persecution can come, but don't be afraid of it. May God help us to not fear the persecution. May God help us not to fear the opposition.

[34:31] May God help us not to fear the tribulation that will come when you, when I, when we are moving forward with the gospel. When we are a church that is shaped by the gospel, you will face the opposition from the evil one.

He will come against us. He will try to curtail you with opposition, with hostility for people to hate you. He'll try to curtail you with sickness and disease or try to curtail us in that way.

We must stand firm. Notice dropping down to verse 29, you see opposition even in Jerusalem.

When he's talking with the Hellenistic Jews, oh, they love that.

They were attempting to put him to death. Again, whether it was because he was speaking about Jesus or they considered him a traitor as well, they wanted him dead. As far as they were concerned, Saul was blaspheming the God of Abraham.

But notice, when the brethren learned of it, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him to Tarshish. They sought to protect Saul and keep him safe, bringing him to Caesarea, which sent him off to Tarshish.

[35:48] And then you don't hear about Saul again until chapter 11, verse 25. So for a couple chapters, you don't hear about Saul. Now, why did they send him to Tarshish? What's there?

Maybe a safe haven for him. He'd be protected. He would most likely continue his ministry of evangelism without murderous threats from these Jews.

Maybe it was there that he grew a knowledge of the Lord and of the Word, of the truth, the revelation God brought to him. But this tells us something, friends. This tells us that it's not a bad thing to escape such to preach again another day.

In other words, you're facing opposition or hostility, sometimes it's okay to run, to get out of town, so you can preach again another day.

So we see here Saul's ministry had begun. Right after his conversion, he took on the commission that Jesus gave to him. And notice what emulates from his ministry.

[36:52] And these are the things that should emulate from us, that we should, it should emulate, we should emulate, excuse me, Saul's ministry. What was his ministry all about? It was Christ-centered.

It was spirit-filled. Gospel proclaiming. Self-sacrificing. Courage-driven. That's the type of ministry Saul had. And this is all of God's grace.

This is all of God being gracious to us. As the church continues to faithfully proclaim the gospel in the midst of suffering, persecution, trials, and tribulations, God will preserve us.

He'll preserve his people and bring others to the truth according to his plan. Which leads us to the next two points. Preservation and multiplication. There in verse 31. God preserves his people.

Notice, the church throughout all Judea, Galilee, Samaria, enjoyed peace. Being built up and proceeding in the fear of the Lord and the comfort of the Holy Spirit and increased.

[37:59] They continued to increase. In spite of persecution, the church grew. In spite of opposition, God preserved his people.

And notice, it says, the church, Judea, Galilee, and Samaria. It's one community in three separate regions.

Remember, church is not a building but a group of people who follow the Lord Jesus Christ. This is not church. And we're not having church.

Are you going to church? No, I'm not going to a people. Well, I am going to a people but we're not thinking people. We're thinking going to a building. Church is not a building. It's people who follow the Lord Jesus Christ.

That term is connected with it. Maybe it's different religions, Roman Catholicism. I don't know what's been connected to this term but people think you go to church or church is a building.

[39:04] It's not. It's people. People who are committed who follow the Lord Jesus Christ. And though there's different churches that we have here what makes us one? It's those of one gospel who are together for the gospel.

What's the gospel? God, humans, Jesus, respond. Who is God, the creator and the sustainer of everything.

Who are we? We are sinners, lawbreakers. Who is Jesus, the second person of the Trinity. Lived a perfect life where you failed. Where we were failures.

Jesus was perfect and yet he died as a substitute for sinners. And he resurrected from the dead. God was so satisfied, so pleased with what he did.

He brought him back to life for all those who turn away from their sin and put their trust in Jesus alone. Friend, are you here and are you not a follower of Jesus?

[40:06] Are you not a Christian? That gospel message is for you. You need to respond. You need to repent and put your trust in Jesus alone. Stop playing games with God.

Get real. Turn away from sin and put your trust in him. That's what makes us one. It's the gospel. You have different things that we might disagree with but what is the thing that brings us together for the gospel?

It's the gospel. It's the gospel. So the church experienced peace and edification. As they experienced peace it led to strength.

As their attitudes feared the Lord. Which led to spiritual growth. They're fearing the Lord and not fearing people. They're fearing the Lord and not fearing the tribulations. And as the Spirit comforted them in the midst of the persecution in the midst of the opposition they were maturing and they increased in numbers.

God strengthened his new community. God was preserving his people. They lived in fearing him. They received the comfort of the Spirit. and in spite of the hardship of persecution in spite of the hardship of opposition God grew his church giving them peace.

[41:26] And then they grew in size and maturity. That's God's agenda. That's how you bring church growth. See in a different way this verse growth in size and maturity is a result of God's Spirit who works amongst God's people by enabling them to minister to each other live in the fear of the Lord and ready to proclaim Christ.

That's what he did. God preserves us. He sustains us. He strengthens us. He gives us his grace. We fear him.

We're not fearing people. We're not fearing man. We're fearing him. And then as it says the comfort of the Spirit is there so he's sustaining us and preserving us and the comfort of the Spirit and then we increase and grow.

So what's God's agenda? He transforms us. And then we proclaim. There's opposition. There's going to be opposition.

It happens. But God will preserve us and he'll multiply us. That's how he does it. When God changes us he makes us passionate proclaimers of his gospel.

[42:44] Yet this proclamation always brings opposition. But in the midst of the opposition God sustains us by his grace praise his name and multiplies the church.

So that's God's agenda for the church to bring about church growth. I hope you're encouraged by God's word and I want to encourage you to take a few moments to sit and ponder what we've seen

in God's word.

We'll take a few moments of silence for you to think about what we've seen here in Acts chapter 9 and after some moments of silence for us to ponder what we've seen here in God's word we'll do our time of giving we'll sing our last two songs and have our closing prayer.

So take a moment please if you would a moment of silence and think and ponder what we've seen in God's word this morning. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.