

GAMECHANGER – PART ONE
BRINGING ADVERSARIES TOGETHER
ACTS 9:1-20 - ©DR. LARRY L. THOMPSON (2010)

Introduction:

The political pundits are saying that they have not seen a nation so divided since the days of the Viet Nam War. There is political polarization the likes of which we have not seen in our lifetime. It doesn't matter if you are on the RIGHT or the LEFT you have to wonder if we will ever be able to come together again as a nation. I get frustrated listening to the news and people arguing their positions when you know by listening to them they are never going to change the other's mind.

WHAT WE NEED IN OUR CULTURE TODAY IS A SPIRITUAL "GAMECHANGER!"

"A game changer is defined as a person or action that re-defines the sector where it competes; a person, an idea or an event that completely changes the present situation."

Over the course of the next few weeks we will discover some spiritual gamechangers and learn how we can apply their principles to our lives in order to be a gamechanger for our generation. **Each week I will introduce you to a modern day GAMECHANGER and then we will look at the biblical counterpart and make our personal application.**

Often a GAMECHANGER makes a decision that he or she never expect to actually make the impact that it does...they are often surprised at how the Lord used them to encourage others.

Most of the time, a gamechanger is a risk taker...**Such was the case of Kris Hogan, head football coach at Grapevine Faith High School who carefully considered his opponent, Gainesville State School.** The decision the coach made not only was a gamechanger for the night but it literally inspired millions of people all over the world. **Let's watch the story of this week's GAMECHANGER.**

ROLL VIDEO OF KRIS HOGAN (5:29)

The two characters in today's biblical study from ACTS represents the two sides of polar opposites. On one side was Saul, the number one persecutor of the followers of Jesus Christ. **When Jesus was crucified the High Priest thought that His death would put an end to His radical ideas.** But with Jesus death and His resurrection **His followers became even bolder in proclaiming that Jesus is the promised Messiah.** To Saul, this was the worst type of blasphemy. Saul was a brilliant, ambitious and faithful young Jewish man, completely committed to the Law and made it his personal challenge to completely stop the heretical followers of Jesus. **He showed up at the stoning of Stephen and it is obvious he approves of the death sentence.** He goes from that scene and we are told in

Acts 8:3: "But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison." Acts 8:3 (NIV)

In today's focal passage we find Saul on his way to Damascus with the death warrants in his hand and ready to imprison, beat and even murder anyone who mentions the name of Jesus.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the street opposing Saul is a simple man; a man we know very little about. **All we know of Ananias is that he lived in Damascus and was a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ.** We know that Ananias was absolutely certain that Jesus is Lord and that Saul of Tarsus is his worst enemy.

"Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest ² and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. ³ As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. ⁴ He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" ⁵ "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. ⁶ "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." ⁷ The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. ⁸ Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. ⁹ For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything. ¹⁰ In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!" "Yes, Lord," he answered. ¹¹ The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. ¹² In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight." ¹³ "Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem. ¹⁴ And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name." ¹⁵ But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. ¹⁶ I will show him how much he must suffer for my name." ¹⁷ Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord--Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here--has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." ¹⁸ Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, ¹⁹ and after taking some food, he regained his strength. Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. ²⁰ At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God." Acts 9:1-20 (NIV)

The two men faced off; both feeling their views about the other man was set in stone and nothing could change their attitudes. They are as different as night and day. Put them together in the same room and you can guarantee a fight.

However, as Saul races toward Damascus to destroy those who follow Christ, **he suddenly meets a true immovable, unchangeable opponent.** There is a flash of light from Heaven and the voice of the Lord saying, **"Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"**

Had Saul not been struck blind and powerless he might have said to Jesus, ***"Because I serve the Lord God; the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. You and your followers are ruining my people's understanding of who God is and I can't let that happen."***

SWITCH TO ANANIAS:

Here we have a quiet, faithful committed man, going about his everyday business, honoring the Lord; not looking for a confrontation **when suddenly, Jesus, the Gamechanger, enters the conversation.** ***"Get up and go find Saul of Tarsus and lay hands on him so that he can see again, because he is the one who will preach the gospel to the Gentiles."***

Ananias must have resisted, "I surely didn't hear you correctly...it sounded a little bit like you said go find Saul of Tarsus...surely you know he is looking for men like to me to throw me in prison or even kill me...**Perhaps you haven't heard but he is not preaching the gospel to anyone...as a matter of fact, he is killing those who do preach the gospel.**"

Now picture the GAMECHANGER looking at one corner and seeing a sightless Saul groping in the dark and the other corner a fearful and completely incredulous Christian by the name of Ananias hiding in fear. **BOTH MEN, LIKE ALL OF US, FINDING IT HARD TO BELIEVE THAT GOD'S LOVE AND GRACE REALLY DOES EXTEND TO OUR WORST ENEMIES.**

Jesus gently tells them both: ***"Trust me and do exactly what I told you to do."***

With that one act, the GAMECHANGER takes that which was immovable and unchangeable and suddenly everything is NEW. By God's power Ananias goes and lays hands on Saul and heals him, then baptizes him. Saul's murderous rage against the followers of Christ transforms into the strongest passion every witnessed in a Christian's life and he becomes one of the greatest preachers to truth sharing with a people he once believed were on the wrong side of God's eternal story.

GAMECHANGING TRUTHS FROM TODAY'S MESSAGE:

- **GAMECHANGERS PREPARE PEOPLE TO SEE BEYOND WHAT THEY THINK IS POSSIBLE**

- **GAMECHANGERS HELP REDIRECT OUR PERSPECTIVE.**

Ananias no longer worried about his life but placed his focus on helping Saul and Saul no longer was driven to destroy every Christian but now had a passion to see that everyone had the opportunity to become a Christian.

- **GAMECHANGERS TURN FOES INTO FAMILY - v.17** “Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord--Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here--has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.”

What a divine appointment that Ananias experienced that day. He went from the hesitant fear of Saul, hating his work, fearing him...to the point where he now calls him "Brother" and accepts him in the same kingdom! To be counted as a brother in Christ after his attempts to ruin the church must have been a great shock and astonishment for Saul. What a blessed introduction into the Christian family. There was no word of reproach for his persecuting activities, no vehement words that Saul should pay for what he has done, no silent ridicule, nothing but the soothing sound of a brother from the lips of another individual who has experienced God's grace.

Notice the healing process that accompanies the ministry of a GAMECHANGER: **“Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized.” (v.18)** It is like his past has been forgiven...he was blind but now he can see.

God has a way of changing the GAME in our life. Think about the progression of Paul's day: **Paul started his day as...**

- **PAUL BEGAN HIS DAY AS A PROUD MAN**
- **HE BECAME A BROKN MAN**
- **GOD ULTIMATELY MADE HIM A NEW MAN**

Talk about a GAMECHANGER!

Conclusion:

At the end of Texas football game, the Gainseville State School QB by the name of Isaiah asked if he could join the other team for prayer in the center of the field. He asked if he could lead the prayer. Coach Hogan said, “I had no idea what this young man was going to say.” He prayed, *“God, I don't really know what or how this all happened today. I really don't know how to say thank you but you showed me today that there are people who really do care about other people. For the first time, I feel really good. Thank you God.”*