



The Storyteller Radio Broadcast

Allen Early (Apache)

My name is Allen Early. I am a member of the San Carlos Apache tribe. I'm from San Carlos, Arizona.

I'm speaking to you today about my life story, but first I begin with reading John chapter three verses, 16, 17, and 18. It says "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He that believeth on Him is not condemned but He that believeth not is condemned already, because He hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."

This was the verse that I heard when I first heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It means a whole lot to me, these verses.

I was born and raised on the San Carlos Apache Reservation, brought up by my family. My mother and my dad were together, and they spent time sharing with me about their traditional ways on the reservation.

My dad comes from a long leadership of a certain clan on the reservation. They call it Bear Clan, and we came to San Carlos, and we encountered some conflict as we come to the reservation, and our chief was killed, but when the chief died his wife was very involved. She became the leader of our clan. Her name was Lucy Quade. She was a rider, and would ride on horseback and lead us, and our people came to San Carlos. That's where I grew up.

In 1929, the San Carlos dam was established by the United States Government. President Calvin Coolidge came to San Carlos, the old San Carlos, and he made a speech there and dedicated a bridge, a new dam, which is called the Coolidge Dam today.

Many of you may not know, but that is the location, under the dam where the water is today, used to be the old San Carlos. I have brothers and sisters that are buried underneath that lake. There was a cemetery, there was a government. My name is Early because the government office is buried underneath there. And just prior, when the water was rising, I am told the agency building burned, and a lot of the property, so there our records burned. And because of it my dad was in line one day and he was trying to figure out, "What shall I call myself?", cause they lost all the records.

My dad was a cowboy, so at that time some of the elderlies, they thought, since my dad was a cowboy, he rides a horse, they called him a cowboy, and they thought Joe means cowboy. So they say, "Your name be Joe cause you ride horse every day."

And one of the government employees was standing, a non-Indian, nearby, his last name was Early, and he said, "Well, your last name must be Early; if you can't come up with it, use my last name." So they called him Joseph Early, and that's how I'm Allen Early. My name is probably just an Indian name or something else before, I don't know.

So when the water began to rise, we moved to a new San Carlos, and that's where I am from.

San Carlos was where I was born and where I was raised to believe my own way. My dad said, "There's only one way and that is our way, the Indian way." We worship at a certain place called Holy Ground, and my dad was a messenger. Whenever there was dance or prayer time going on, any special prayer time, he would spread the word, going to Cibecue, Whiteriver, and he would cover hundreds of miles and come back in the evening. And he said, "It only takes two hours to go around and do that. I could be home in three hours," he said. But much power was used, the evil power, to shorten the distance and the miles that my dad went.

But anyway I found out how powerful it was to worship the way my family were teaching me, so I saw a lot of power. I saw people being prayed for in our home as a little boy, where people who were injured, sometimes they were very ill, and they would get healed right there and they were changed. Sometimes things happened miraculously right before my eyes, which really encouraged me to believe in it.

And so I used to tell my dad, "I want to learn more about this, I want to learn to do the tricks that you're doing; can you teach me?"

And so he said, "We are going to develop you. You will grow with it as we eat and talk and live here you will learn. By the time you get to my age you will be a powerful man," and so anyway I have high respect for him.

That's why in the earlier years I resisted the missionaries. They'd come to the reservation, and try to give out Bibles, Christian book materials to promote the Gospel. I didn't know; I really felt that that was wrong, that was not for the native people. I thought the Indian way was the best way, the only way. That was what I was made to believe.

And not growing on the reservation, many of you know how we get used to the way we live. We don't agree with what is on the outside. We always think they're after us for something. Sometimes we think they're taking our land away, but I didn't know that they had good purposes, so I was lost.

Growing up on the reservation, I really stuck with my dad. He taught me a lot of things. We worked on the ranch, cattle, riding horses; all these things I did. All this time my dad was spending time with me. He really developed my mind to carry on our Native way, to believe, to pray in that religion.

But when I became a teenager, my dad sent me to a school in Tucson. I went to school there, a boarding school. I think the reason why he sent me there was because what he was teaching me, his prayer life, his religious devotion, to carry on our ways, he thought if he sent me to a Christian school at least there they would pray and I would have that idea still.

I don't know whether he saw the difference. But I was sent there and it was at Tucson that I went to school. While I was going to school there, I met young people from other tribe and they introduced me to a lot of things like drinking.

And we used to run off from the school on weekends and go into town and get drunk, and we would probably run away and go back to the reservation sometimes.

But anyway, being in Tucson, I ran away from school with these guys. We were on the streets at night in Tucson. They taught me. They used to carry a long piece of chain to fight with, carry knives, and I used to wonder why they carry knives. And you know, later I found out that you can defend yourself with it. And they used to show me how to hit a person, where to stab them if you get into a fight, how do you make your own knife that will really kill somebody, and I learned these things. A lot of things they taught me and so I got into the habit of drinking. I liked going out with them.

And many times we got picked up while we were in the city, and I end up at Tucson County jail, and I been in and out of there and I started to miss school there in Tucson. They let me go from there. They told me, "You go home because you're not serious about going to school."

So I went back to the reservation. Coming back on the reservation, I tried to share the things I learned about being with a gang and fighting others on the streets, and on the reservation the evil idea of fighting, hatred and bitterness against non-members of the tribe grew among us as we congregate together.

We went out at night. We use to think that we were patrolling the reservation. We used to say that we were trying to protect our people and our ways. But because of that I got in trouble with the law.

Sometimes we fought, we stab people. One time I was walking down the road and I saw a man punishing his little boy. I don't know what he did or for what reason, but he was hitting him with a stick, so I went over there. I told him to leave his boy alone, and he just told me, "Mind your own business," so I attack him with my knife and I stabbed him several times in the body. And then when he turn around and looked at me real close, I stab him in his right eye and cut his eye out.

And that's one of some of the things I did. And, you know, because of that, I was in jail for a long time. I was a regular at the jailhouse. They tried to do everything they could to work with me.

They took me to counseling, they sent me away, but there's always ways that I could get out.

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One time I was drinking in town, in Globe. I went home in the middle of the night; somehow I got home. I got to fight with my dad. My mom would say, "No, don't do that," I guess, and try to me from fighting with my dad. She told me that later, "You had a 22 rifle," and I hit my mother over the head, and she said, "You turned against me and you said, 'I'm going to kill you.' You hit me over the head, and that's the last thing I remember," she said.

But because of it, later on I got caught, and I was in jail for a long time.

I was on drugs, I was on alcohol, I couldn't stop. I promised the tribal judge, the federal judge, if they would go easy on me and allow me, have mercy on my case, and that would be free. I told them I would make every effort to go back to school, to better myself, and not come back into this facility.

But you know, I couldn't keep my words. I was very deep with alcohol and drugs and activities of the wrong way. I began to escape from jail. I did some things on the reservation, it's either stabbing, fighting. I get behind the bars and I escape. I escaped ten times, and I go in the village with my friends, we'd kick in doors at night where they sell liquor, alcohol. I would break in, we would break in, sometimes take their groceries, their money, their whatever alcohol was available, we'd take it.

People became afraid of me. Afraid of the gang I had. They wanted us put away. I heard that a lot of people appeared at a tribal council meeting and they asked the tribal council to call on federal authorities to come on the reservation, to look for me and find me and put me away forever.

They don't want Allen Early on the reservation. "He's dangerous. Do something about it." And so that's what they did. It was ordered that the police department in Gila and Graham county would come together for me and look for me, arrest me. They chased me around on the reservation for over a year.

I remember one night, I came home from out of town. I came to the house where my mother lives. I went inside, and there was a table inside, and she said, "Sit down, I'll give you something to eat." Just as I sat down and started to eat, I heard something outside. It sound like somebody was walking. Somebody kick something out... there was noise outside... and I jumped to my feet and I look out the window. I lift the curtain, I look outside and I saw the police were coming. There was a flashlight way over there outside the gate, and I told my mother, "Police!" and I put a dishtowel over the food I was eating.

Many years before, in the house where we were, I've cut a hole in a corner, where, if I was ever trapped in that house, I would run through that little hole and get away from the police. And so I remembered that and I went to that. It was still there. I opened it. Outside of that wall of the house, I had three 55 gallon barrels sitting together, tied together against the house. And these barrels had a big hole in it where you could go outside and sit in it and hide in there.

So when they came to the door and begin to knock on the door, I went into that little can outside and I sat there quietly. And the police came in and they searched all over. I was told they looked under the bed. They looked into the attic and everywhere and they said, "He's not here," and they went out and left.

They didn't know, they never found me that night, that I was sitting in that can. As a young boy I built a little place, a little house up in the tree. I used to go there and spend the night there. And I was up there one night, and the police were looking for me, and they came and surrounded the house. I was watching from behind them, and they went into the house looking for me. They couldn't find me because I was in that tree.

I couldn't sleep sometimes at night when I was hiding, when I was running from the law. Even during the day I couldn't sit still. I didn't have peace, couldn't rest. I went from one place to another throughout the night. I was getting tired, running from the law.

And then it started raining. It was cold December night, it was raining. Raining for several days, and I was living outside on the desert, sleep on the mountain called Bucket Mountain near San Carlos. I decided, "Maybe I'll go home tonight."

I went home early that night, maybe about four o'clock I came home. When I came home, somehow, somehow the police found out I was home. They came, and so I went out the back door. I ran towards the flood. The flood was high, but I jumped in and ran across the flood. When I made it across the flood, I went up into the canyon to reach to the big Water Mountain, so I could go on my way back to Safford.

But when I went way up there on the mountain, I met these police officers on horseback. When I came out of that little wash, way half way to the top, in front of me there were three police officers on the horse. They told me to stop, one of them fired a gun. It was big gun I knew. It was shooting at me, and I ran across that little wash, and they were shooting at me, and I found out that there were many more on the other side. So I was surrounded and I stopped.

They aimed right at me. This police officer, a lieutenant with the local police department, he shot at me, he missed me - he was very close.

Later on that police officer, he used to come to me, he said, "Allen, that day when I shot at you," he said, "I shouldn't have missed you." He said, "I shot at you three times to blow your head off, and I missed you." He says he believed that God had his hand over my head, and that's why he missed me.

But that day they took me down, they shackled me, they handcuffed me and put me in solitary confinement at the new facility on the reservation. I thought, "Well, it won't be long before I get out." I always prayed that I would get away with these things that, "Sure, that's what's going to happen."

When I was inside that first few days I was in there, in jail, I remember I quietly sang, prayed, very serious about what I was doing. I tried to make it work, but it wouldn't work. For some reason it didn't happen. I commanded things to happen with the power that I was taught. It could be by prayer, it could be by things I did. A lot of times... don't want to share that because it's not good for people... it didn't work.

I found an old mattress cover over in the corner behind a water faucet. Somebody had pushed a ball of cotton behind there, maybe to stop a leak or whatever it was there for, and I found when I pulled it out it was a long mattress cover. And I tore it up and make little ropes out of it. I tied it around my neck.

There above the cell, they had a heavy screen made out of metal, and I used to pull myself with one arm up there and tie a rope around my neck and tie it to the cover and drop my body. Three times I did that. They always come. When I was dangling from there, they would cut me down, and I figured out that somehow, somebody, one of the trustees that came in, he looked up there and say, "Where's that machine that picks out the sound?"

So I found out they were listening to me in the front room, and they heard what I was doing, and when I hang myself they probably heard my breathing or whatever it was when I was struggling there. So the fourth time I tried it again, but I couldn't, so then I went on hunger strike.

And I was laying on the floor, and then I heard somebody sing a song out in the hallway. He sang a song "Jesus Paid It All". Never heard that song, but I could remember that song.

Events so different that day. When I heard him sing that song, I got up, and sat up, and listened to his testimony. And he shared with us how he was saved in a Los Angeles County jail; how somebody came to witness to him and tell him about God.

This man told him God loves him, no matter what he did. He could be saved today and be changed. When that man left and went out, he was laying on the top bunk one day and he was thinking, "There's really no hope for me."

The more he thought about how God cares and loves him and would save him and make a difference in his life, he was so under conviction that he decided, as he looked into the ceiling, “God, do you think you can change me? I have so many problems. My life is a mess.” As he looked into the ceiling, he got so real and real, and he began to beg with God, “Forgive me, save me, come into my life and change me. I’m going to let you change my life.”

He said that’s what he did in the Los Angeles County jail.

One Sunday morning this man was preaching, and he read these verses. He said, “God so loved the world. In John 3:16 it says... this is God’s Word. It is a biblical fact that God loves you,” he said. “Don’t let anybody tell you anything else.” He said, “I want you to know that God loves you. Whoever you are, you’re listening to me right now.”

He said, “God cares about you. Don’t you think that nobody cares, there’s somebody that really cares. God planned many years ago to save you, to change you, to give you a better life, to give you hope. And He did that by sending Jesus Christ, His Son. He came to show you how much God loves you, and Jesus gave His life on the cross for you.”

“When Christ died on the cross, He died there because of the way you are, very selfish ways in your sinful life. He took the penalty of your sins, all the bad things you’ve done. Jesus suffered on the cross for your sins because he loves you. “

You know, as I listened to him inside that dark cell, I became very interested in it. I never was told that. I never realized that, that there’s somebody that really cares about me to the point where He’s willing to die to save me, to help me. I didn’t know that.

I thought to myself, you mean He loves Allen Early. I’m bad, I’m no good. I have been told that, “You’re no good because you were born in a family that are man killer.” They used to call us, all the Early family, are man killer. And they used to say, “You are nobody, you’re nothing. You’ll turn out to be nothing because you come from that family. You’re no good.”

But here this man was telling me, “God loves you, Allen. He loves you.”

I felt in my heart, “It is true. How could He love me? If He loves Allen Early...”; it just went deep in my heart. I couldn’t believe it.

Then he said, in verse 17, “For God didn’t send His Son into the world to condemn you.” Again I was touched.

I always thought, even when I was running up out there free up in the mountain, in the desert, sometimes I felt like somebody was watching me. Sometimes it felt like somebody was about to hit me over the head because of the kind of person I am.

But He's telling me here, "God's Son Jesus, He came to save you. He didn't come to judge you. He didn't come to find fault with you. He came to save you. He came to forgive you. If you will come to Him, He said, He is willing to forgive you."

That's why the Bible says, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and He is just...". Be careful with God, because He's a just God. He says in verse 18, "He that believeth on Him is not condemned." If you will believe on Jesus Christ, he says you're free, you're not condemned. You're not going to be judged. You don't need to worry about the future. You have hope; there's peace for you. "But he that believeth not is condemned already, because he had not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."

If you do not believe on the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, who died for you and I on Calvary's cross, who shed His precious blood on the cross. He was buried and on the third day He rose again. If you do not accept that, you have no hope.

It is not because you have been a greater sinner that He can't save you. Oh yes, He can save you if you will believe He loves you. He came to help you, not to judge you, but if you will believe... believe mean to accept it, to believe what the Bible says about Jesus... Jesus can save. No wonder the apostle Paul says in the Bible "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved."

No wonder the angels, they said about Jesus, "And His name shall be Jesus for He shall save His people from their sins," because Jesus is the Savior.

And you know, my friends, as I sat there in that jail, in that dark place all alone, I was so under conviction. Everything was so real, I believed that God loved me no matter what I've done in the past. I believe Jesus came. I believe God reached out in love to change my life, to make a new creature out of me. He had a purpose for that, and He reached out to me on that day.

I believe that I'd been believing the wrong thing. I believed my own way. I was jealous of that way. I didn't realize that He could come into my life.

If I will accept Him and believe and receive the Lord Jesus, I didn't realize that He would change me until that moment. I wanted, I wanted to be changed. I had a desire down in my heart that broke me. It brought tears to my eyes, and I fell on my knees as the minister outside in the hallway somewhere, that voice was saying, "Will you get on your knees wherever you are and pray." That man out there was praying in English, but inside that cell where I was, by myself, I fell to my knees and I prayed in my own language.

I said, "Oh God, thank you for your love. Do you realize who it is you love? I'm a dangerous man, Lord, I'm a dangerous man. I'm an alcoholic, I'm a drug addict. You name it, that's what I am. I've hurt many people. I'm not afraid of anything or anybody, but today I found out you love me. You want to save me.

So that day I asked Jesus, “Don’t allow me to go into hell to be judged for my sin. Come into my heart and save me.”

After I accepted the Lord Jesus as my Savior in that cell, I spent some more time in there.

Early one morning, you know, a captain came to the door. He talked to me for a while, just visiting me. Asked me how I feel, what I’m going through. I would tell him, “Well, it’s a wonderful thing.”

I had a Bible in my hand. I said, “The preacher that came here, you know, he came here the other day. He was allowed to see me five minutes, and he stood there where you’re standing, and I told him I accepted Jesus inside several weeks ago. And I took Jesus as my Savior and it’s been different in my heart.” So I told him to, “Pray for me. I really want to follow the Lord.”

He took his Bible and handed to me and said, “Look, this is God’s Word. I’m going to leave this Bible with you. I want you to read the book of John. I want you to read only the Gospel of John. Don’t worry about Revelation or other books. Read the book of John over and over and over until you get out of here. It will make you a strong believer that Jesus Christ is the Savior, the Son of the living God. It will make you a believer of God’s Word, and you will also believe that the Bible teaches that God in His Spirit, we don’t see it, but He comes inside of you when you invite Him to come in, and He’s your teacher, He’s right there in your heart. Talk to him,” he said, “you can whisper to Him sometimes. Ask Him to help you every day as you read, so that you can be strong. If you’re weak, tell Him you want strength. If you’re unhappy, tell Him to give you peace and joy in your heart, and He will.”

So that’s what I did. I began to read the Bible inside.

You know, the longer I lived in that dark cell, I got so used to it, and I was able to read my Bible inside that dark cell. And so I began to learn, and at the same time the officers would come, you know, every month they took me to the hospital to get checked up, make sure that nothing go wrong.

One morning, as I was sitting in my cell, I heard noise; somebody was unlocking my door and when I got up, there was six police officers there, and I thought to myself, “I’m going to be transferred today. I’ve done so many things bad,” but I thought in my own heart, “They’re taking me probably to federal court.”

They wrapped a chain around my waist and handcuffed me, and they took me, two officers in front, one holding me, one walking beside me and two behind me. We marched down the hallway and we went into the chambers where a new judge was sitting. There was a new judge. I didn’t know that.

And he said, “I was told by the police officers that your life is changed, you’re a different person. They say you’re a Christian.” He asked me, “Is that true?” and I said, “Yes. While I was in jail I became a Christian. I accepted Him as my Savior, the Lord as my Savior.”

And to me he says, "That means that you're not going to drink or fight or do anything wrong anymore." He says, "You know, Allen, I have the authority to send you away forever. I can send you away and you could be gone for a long, long time. Let me tell you," he says, "You've done a lot of bad things on the reservation. You have hurt a lot of people. You've escaped so many times that people are worried, and they came before the government, and they wanted you put away forever. But I also have the authority to take your records and set you free." So he said, "Because these police officers here, they tell me you've changed, and because I believe in you, I'm going to take your records," and he took a pile of my records, he began to tear it in two to little pieces and he threw it into waste basket.

He sat there and he said, "Allen, I want you to go out that door and don't ever come back, and as you go let me ask you," he says, "I'm not a Christian, pray for me." I said, "I will."

And I went out the door. They took the shackles off, they took the handcuffs and the chains that wrapped around my waist, and I went out. I was released.

When I went outside, I started to walk down towards where we used to live, and a thought came to me. I looked back at the jail and I thought to myself, "I'm free now." And I thought, "Many years ago, when Jesus Christ, the Son of God, went to the cross, He died for my sin on the cross. He was buried; rose again; He went back to Heaven - because I believe in that, what He did for me, because I received Him as my Savior."

223 days ago, up in Heaven, God forgave me. He destroyed all my criminal records. He made me clean. He made me a new person. He forgave me all my sins. I don't have any more criminal record in Heaven because God took my sins, just like that judge did. He tore up my records and he threw it away. God did the same thing.

Right now it is appointed unto every person, every soul, to die for their sin. But I praise God, when my time comes, my sin has been done away with. I'm a new person, I'm free. God will not announce the penalty on my sin anymore. I'm free. The blood of Christ has covered all, and blots out all my sin. He delivered me. He changed my life.

I'm happy with my life today. I thank God for His Word, the Bible. I thank God for the privilege of serving the Lord, witnessing. I try with all my ability. I'm very limited in many ways, but I want to be very faithful to Him and serve Him until the day I die.

I don't believe that my Apache religion would do this. It would not give me the freedom and the peace and the joy that Christ gives me. Christ has greater power.

Today I hear people are turning back to Indian religion. Let me tell you, my brothers and sisters, that is not the right way.

Jesus Christ is the only way. I'm saying it with all my heart because I know who I am. I know what kind of person I was. I had bitterness, I had hatred, and Jesus Christ changed my ways.

I do not want to go back for one minute to do the things that I used to practice before I became a Christian.

Christ delivered me from Indian religion and I found new life in Christ. He has more power. Today I carry this message, that there is hope for you, for anybody, no matter who you are, no matter what you've done. He can take your record and put it away, destroy.

You can come to Christ, and receive Him as your Savior.

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