



+ **YOU**

SUMMER 2022
Never Alone

Sermon Series: Never Alone: The Holy Spirit in our Lives.

To be used with: Session 2: Born Again by the Spirit

Sermon Title Possibilities: The Power of a Changed Life

Scripture: Acts 9:22-31

Connection with Unit Theme: To complement the small group study *Never Alone: The Holy Spirit in our Lives*, these sermon outlines will follow the same theme as the small group study, so the pastor can reinforce the study from the pulpit.

The Point: The Holy Spirit brings us into a new life as we place our trust in Jesus.

Introduction: My all-time favorite movie is “Sergeant York”. Gary Cooper portrayed Alvin York, who singlehandedly captured 132 German prisoners in World War I. He was a corporal at the time, but this act of heroism earned him a promotion to sergeant. It also earned him numerous decorations, including the Distinguished Service Cross and the Congressional Medal of Honor. In the early part of the movie, York is depicted as being quite a heathen, which is true enough. He was raised in a Christian home, but his father died when he was in his early twenties. He fell in with the wrong crowd, and it wasn’t long before he was drinking heavily and constantly getting into fights. You may remember a scene in the movie where he gets struck by lightning, but that never happened. In real life, an evangelist held a series of meetings in his community. York attended, and the sermons really made an impression on him. One thing led to another, and he finally surrendered his life to Christ. He quit drinking, fighting, and gambling, and he became involved in a local church. He taught a children’s Sunday School class and led the music in the worship services, and he eventually came to be known as “the Singing Elder”.

Alvin York is just one example among many people whose lives were transformed by the power of the Gospel. In some cases, the change was so radical that people were reluctant to believe it. The book of Acts tells of someone else who experience such a change. This man hated the church, and everything connected with it. In fact, he was on a personal crusade to destroy it. Yet one day, while traveling on the road to Damascus, this man had a face-to-face encounter with Jesus, and his life was never the same. Of course, I’m talking about Saul, who became the apostle Paul. People were reluctant to believe it at first, and who could blame them? How could they possibly believe that the church’s worst enemy was now a follower of Jesus? Yet as people observed Saul in action, they became convinced by the power of a changed life.

I. The price of a changed life.

A. Saul had just recently come to faith in Jesus.

1. He had met Jesus while traveling to Damascus.

a. After his sight was restored, he was baptized.

b. He began preaching in synagogues that Jesus was the Messiah.

2. He spent some time in Arabia, then returned to Damascus (Gal. 1:17). What he did in Arabia is a mystery.
 - a. Some scholars believe he studied the Old Testament, especially the prophecies of the Messiah, while others believe he preached the Gospel (I personally believe he did both).
 - b. His faith grew stronger.
 - Spiritual growth is a process. It doesn't happen overnight, and it continues throughout life. We won't be perfect until we get to heaven. People will notice as you grow in Christ.
- B. He quickly made quite a few enemies.
 1. The Jewish leaders in Damascus plotted to kill him.
 - a. Ironically, Paul had first come to Damascus to arrest Christians. Now he was a Christian, and his own countrymen wanted to kill him!
 - b. His friends learned of the plot. When night fell, they helped him escape by lowering him down the city wall in a basket.
 2. When you choose to follow Christ, it can cost you.
 - a. It can cost you your friends and your reputation.
 - When I was a teenager, Dallas Holm was one of the more popular Christian singers. I once heard him say that when you give your life to Christ, it's not necessary to break with your friends. Just tell them what happened to you, and a lot of that will take care of itself. He said his friends acted like he had leprosy!
 - b. In some countries, it can cost you your life.

II. The paradox of a changed life.

- A. A paradox is a statement or idea that seems absurd, maybe even self-contradictory, but is nonetheless true.
 1. To a new believer, the Christian life can seem like a paradox.
 - a. On the one hand, you've been forgiven of your sins, you're a citizen of God's kingdom, and you have eternal life in heaven.
 - b. On the other hand, your new life can cause misunderstanding and ill-will, even from people who are supposed to be on your side!
 2. Saul experienced this paradox when he returned to Jerusalem.
 - a. Three years had passed since his conversion (Galatians 1:18). He had probably been shunned by the Jewish religious leaders after his conversion, and they likely considered him a traitor.
 - b. He tried to mix and mingle with followers of Jesus, but they also shunned him because they were skeptical of his conversion.
- B. Barnabas spoke up in Saul's defense.
 1. He was first introduced in Acts 4:36-37.
 - a. He had likely heard rumors of Saul's conversion and checked them out to see if they were true.
 - b. He took Saul before the apostles and spoke in his behalf.
 2. Barnabas' testimony evidently convinced the apostles.
 - a. Saul spent some time with Peter and with James, the Lord's brother (Galatians 1:18-19).
 - b. Among other things, Saul likely picked their brains about Jesus.

3. When you are serious about following Jesus, others will take notice.
 - a. They may mock your beliefs, but they won't be able to deny the difference Jesus has made in your life.
 - b. Keep on living for Jesus, and let God take care of your critics.

III. The persistence of a changed life.

- A. When you trust in Jesus as your Savior, that doesn't mean life will be easy.
 1. We still live in a fallen world, and we're not immune to its problems.
 - a. We still deal with sickness, tragedy, and injustice.
 - b. Jesus warned that the world would hate us (John 15:18-20).
 2. Many of Saul's problems were just beginning.
 - a. He "disputed against the Grecians". In other words, he preached in synagogues that were populated by Greek-speaking Jews, and they became so angry that they plotted to kill him.
 - b. Some of Saul's friends learned of the plot, so they put him in a ship to Tarsus, which was his hometown.
- B. Though he was forced to flee Jerusalem, Saul's ministry was not over.
 1. The Bible doesn't say what Saul did in Tarsus, but we can safely assume he continued preaching.
 - a. He was likely kicked out of the synagogue there, too, and he might have even been disowned by his family.
 - b. Sometime later, he joined Barnabas in Antioch, and from there they went out on their first missionary journey.
 2. If you're a follower of Jesus, things will not always be easy for you.
 - a. With the growing hostility toward Christians in America, who knows what the future holds for us?
 - b. We don't need to worry, because our Lord has promised He will prevail in the end (John 16:33).

Conclusion: I'm sure many of you can say Jesus has made a difference in your lives, just as he made a difference in Saul's. The question is, do people see that difference? I'm not implying that Christians are perfect. We won't be perfect until we get to heaven, but we are to be different from the rest of the world, and people should notice the difference. Think about all that's going on in the world right now: economic uncertainty, instability overseas, etc. What an opportunity this is for followers of Jesus to stand out! We don't need to live in constant fear because we know our Lord is still in control. I'm not saying we shouldn't be concerned; I'm just saying we should keep our concerns in the right perspective. Remember, our real citizenship is not in this world, but in the Kingdom of God, and not even the devil himself can take that away.

Ken Jones is the pastor of Worsham Baptist Church in Farmville, Virginia. He holds a B.S. in history from the University of Tennessee at Martin and an MDiv. from Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary. His wife, Celia Carroll Jones, is an associate professor of government at Hampden-Sydney College.