

**GO FORWARD!**



*In Victory*

## **SERMON**

### **TITLE**

Go Forward in Victory!

### **TEXT**

1 Corinthians 15:50-58

### **KEY VERSE**

But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 15:57)

### **THEME**

Jesus won victory over sin by dying on the cross. Jesus won victory over death by rising again. His victory over sin and death equals our victory over sin and death. Through Jesus, Henry F. Milans won this victory and brought many to Christ. Likewise, we too can go forward in victory, (individually and corporately) and help others claim victory in Christ.

### **SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS**

This is a sermon best read in three parts because of the dual narratives and the scripture that introduce them. If you do not have three designated readers, it may be read by a single reader. The split in narratives can be shown by the use of alternating slides on the projection screen.

### **INTRODUCTORY WORSHIP MUSIC**

"Glorious Day" (Casting Crowns version) or the hymn, "One Day" by Wilbur Chapman (see attached resources).

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**READER 1: (LUKE 2:41-52)**

Every year Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the Festival of the Passover. When he was twelve years old, they went up to the festival, according to the custom. After the festival was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it. Thinking he was in their company, they traveled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends. When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him.

After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you."

"Why were you searching for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" But they did not understand what he was saying to them. Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart. And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.

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**[SLIDE: LIVING]**

**READER 2:**

There was once a young man named Henry. Henry grew up in rural Pennsylvania and was raised by two devout parents. He had a classic Christian upbringing in many ways. He was smart, intelligent, affable, and liked by all. He was **living** a blessed life! When it came time to learn a trade he expressed interest in becoming a printer. It was, after all, a blossoming new media. New technology meant that newspapers could be printed in ways that they never could before, so with the blessing of his parents who had now moved the family to Washington, D.C., Henry set out to become a printer.

As he was just a boy he began his print shop apprenticeship by performing chores for the men. He was naturally curious, he asked good questions, and by showing himself a keen worker, he won the respect of the men. They took him with them one day to a nearby tavern for lunch. As they washed down their food with a glass of whiskey, Henry's eyes were drawn to the rich brown liquid as it sloshed around inside the glass. One day while running an errand for the men he passed by the tavern, reached inside his pocket and took out a coin - his meagre earnings, pounded it down on top of the bar just as he saw the men do, and cried out, "Bar keep, a glass of whiskey if you please." This was his very first drink of alcohol. But it would not be his last.

**READER 3:**

In another part of the world, long, long ago, there was another young boy who also set out to learn a trade - the trade of his father, a carpenter. "Pass me that beam of wood, son," said his father in their makeshift wood-shop. The young boy eager to please his father, the skilled craftsman, picked up the piece of

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wood from the pile. He struggled under the weight of the heavy beam as he tried to lift it onto his shoulders.

“Here you go, Father,” he groaned. But before he could pass the wooden plank into the hands of the master carpenter, he began to lose his balance under the weight. Just before he fell, the weight was suddenly taken off his shoulders. He looked up to see his father Joseph smiling at him, holding the beam of wood in his hands. “I got it son. You’re okay now.”

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**[SLIDE: DYING]**

**READER 1: ISAIAH 53:1-7; 12**

Who has believed our message  
and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?  
He grew up before him like a tender shoot,  
and like a root out of dry ground.  
He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him,  
nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.  
He was despised and rejected by mankind,  
a man of suffering, and familiar with pain.  
Like one from whom people hide their faces  
he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.  
Surely he took up our pain  
and bore our suffering,  
yet we considered him punished by God,  
stricken by him, and afflicted.  
But he was pierced for our transgressions,  
he was crushed for our iniquities;  
the punishment that brought us peace was on him,  
and by his wounds we are healed.  
We all, like sheep, have gone astray,  
each of us has turned to our own way;  
and the Lord has laid on him  
the iniquity of us all.  
He was oppressed and afflicted,  
yet he did not open his mouth;  
he was led like a lamb to the slaughter,  
and as a sheep before its shearers is silent,  
so he did not open his mouth.

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Therefore I will give him a portion among the great,  
and he will divide the spoils with the strong,  
because he poured out his life unto death,  
and was numbered with the transgressors.  
For he bore the sin of many...

**READER 2:**

Henry went on in the printing business. As he grew into a young man he made many friends, many drinking friends, at least. He was the life of every party. Every tavern he would walk into, the crowds would shout, "Henry!" in happy welcome. All along however there were signs that the drink was starting to be too much for him. In his early twenties he began to experience delirium tremens on the rare occasion when there was no alcohol in his system. He began to increasingly rely on alcohol in order to avoid the devastating tremors. Still, the country boy was coming into his own in Washington D.C. It was time now to stretch his wings even more as Henry moved to the Big Apple - New York City.

He arrived in New York, thoroughly drunk with no recollection of the long train ride that took him there. He was nearly arrested by a police officer who found him passed out on the street. Wanting to get on in the newspaper industry, Henry tried really hard to limit his drinking strictly to the weekends. By bare-knuckling self effort he was able to do this for some time. His career began to take off, working for a series of respectable newspapers as an editor. He met a young woman named Susan, a preacher's daughter and a church organist turned reporter, whom he married. Together they worked in the newspaper industry. Things were going well. He rarely touched the drink now. But dark clouds were gathering on the horizon. Romans 6:23 tells us that the wages of sin is death. The sin in Henry's life caused by his uninhibited drinking was killing his body, mind, and spirit. The consequences of Henry's sin would be very severe.

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For Henry, life as he knew it would soon be over. His soul was **dying**. How did this happen?

The newspaper industry often led Henry to bad parts of town in the search of the next big scoop. Away from the wholesome influence of his wife, the taverns and drinking holes of New York began to look more and more appealing. This came to a head when once for a seven-day period, Henry did not come home. Susan, sick with worry began to despair. Finally after seven days, Henry came home escorted by two medical attendants. He had been in such a blackout state that he had to be hospitalized in order to save his life. His wife worked extra hard to cover for her husband and due to her sheer dedication, Henry became the senior editor of a prestigious New York newspaper. For two years, Henry was on top of the world, but that came to an end the day Henry got fired.

**READER 3:**

Many years later that same little boy as in our previous story, the son of the carpenter, was now struggling under the weight of another beam of wood - a much heavier Roman cross. The young man was dying. Pierced on the cross with cruel iron nails, he would soon expire. This time his Father was not there to ease the weight of the burden. "My Father, why have you forsaken me?" was his anguished cry. The cruel crowds taunted him.

"He came to save others, but he could not save himself."

With as much strength as he could muster, he looked out at them and then to his Father in Heaven he yelled, "Father forgive them. They don't know what they are doing!" Then, the Son of God died.

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**[SLIDE: BURIED]**

**READER 1: JOHN 19:38-42**

Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jewish leaders. With Pilate's permission, he came and took the body away. He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds. Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs. At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid. Because it was the Jewish day of Preparation and since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

**READER 2:**

Henry's drinking was out of hand. Amid declining sales, the owner of the paper demanded answers. Seeing the empty glass of whiskey on the desk it did not take a genius to discover that Henry's drinking was the source of the newspaper's problems. He was let go. He had one or two attempts at a comeback, but his urge to drink sabotaged any chance he had at success. Finally the day came when upon returning home, Susan was not there to greet him. She had left him.

The former life that Henry knew was all but dead to him. He had gone from a well known newspaper editor to a raging alcoholic, panhandling money for drink in New York's infamous Bowery. A former friend he encountered on the street felt sorry for him and gave him a few dollars. Knowing exactly how many drinks this bit of treasure would buy him, he immediately went to the pub. Hours later, police found him near death on the streets. All but dead, he was taken to Bellevue Hospital. After many admittances and being treated by the world's

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best doctors, he was in the end turned away. The ivy-league trained doctors diagnosed Henry as being completely incurable. **Buried** under his own addiction and a life of sin, the end of Henry's life was fast approaching.

**READER 3:**

After the young man who had been crucified on the cross, died, his body was given into the care of another man named Joseph - not his father, but a disciple on the outer fringe of the Jesus movement. Joseph of Arimathea took the body of Jesus and laid it in his own tomb. Unusually, Pontius Pilate ordered that the tomb be sealed and an armed guard placed outside the stone to prevent the disciples of Jesus from stealing the body in the dead of night. The twelve disciples, those closest to him, scattered in fear. The hopes of his followers were buried with him that day in that stone-cold tomb on a hillside called Calvary.

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[SLIDE: RISING]

**READER 1: JOHN 20:11-16**

Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?"

"They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

He asked her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?"

Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him."

Jesus said to her, "Mary."

She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means "Teacher").

**READER 2:**

On Thanksgiving Day 1910 while sitting on a loading platform, shielding himself from the cold November winds, Henry looked up when he heard soft footsteps approaching. Before him stood a young woman wearing a dark blue bonnet and the distinctive uniform of The Salvation Army. She asked him if he was fed up with his life to the point of changing it. He responded with the doctor's diagnosis that he was an incurable alcoholic.

"Of course they can't cure you there! Yours is more than a physical trouble; it is the sort of heart disease that they can't touch. But listen, Jesus can cure you and make you a good man again if you will let Him." With that she led him downtown to what was called a Boozers' Convention. That's right - a Boozers' Convention. Organized by that master innovator, Colonel William McIntyre of The Salvation Army, the Boozers' Convention was an attempt to witness to the thousands of alcoholics that were found all over New York City. At five in the

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morning, officers would spread out to the far corners of the city and invite those on the street to come back to Memorial Hall for a special service. Not only would they invite them, they would send them by bus, by tram, by horse and wagon - some officers would even march them through the streets. These unique parades even had special floats and costumes to bring attention to the evils of alcoholism.

Henry found himself swept along in such a parade to the Memorial Hall. He heard the Gospel preached to him as never before. He knew that his life could not continue as it was. He felt completely dead in his sins. But for the first time in a long time, he felt something awakening inside of him - a glimmer of hope **rising** in his heart!

**READER 3:**

A young woman named Mary was on her way to the tomb of her friend who was crucified two days ago. She was going to prepare his body for burial but upon her arrival a terrible sight greeted her. The stone in front of the tomb was rolled away. The Roman guards were gone. Horror of horrors! Someone had stolen her Master's body, or so she thought. She ran to get Peter and another disciple. They were so upset by the news that they ran to the tomb, finding only the linen wrappings that his body was wrapped in. One of the disciples remembered back to a promise made by Jesus that after he died he would rise again. Could this be what he meant? Was this even possible?

A man appeared before Mary. Thinking he was the gardener she asked him if he knew where the body was taken. "Mary," he answered. That one word spoken was all it took to awaken Mary's faith. "Teacher!" she cried.

Wonder of wonders, it was possible! Jesus had risen. He was alive. He had come back from the dead. He had appeared to too many people for it to be a hoax. Jesus the Nazarene had risen and because of this irrefutable fact, everything

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had changed. After several weeks of appearances Jesus gathered his disciples together one final time. The book of Acts records it in this way:

### **READER 1: ACTS 1:6-11**

Then they gathered around him and asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”

He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”<sup>1</sup>

### **READER 3:**

As he ascended into Heaven and took his place at the right hand of the Father, Jesus' work did not stop there. He continued to work miracles in the lives of his followers through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. Though we cannot fathom it, the love of Jesus was poured out for every person on the planet! Every human being created in the image of God, Jesus has a deep and passionate love for. It was a love that literally went to hell and back. It was a love that atoned for the sin of Adam and Eve, our first parents. It was an all-saving love. It was a love that reached down one evening into a crowded Salvation Army hall

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<sup>1</sup> Acts 1:6-11



amidst the ruins of sin-wrecked city and caused a man that was dead to come alive!

**READER 2:**

As Henry Milans sat there pondering his eternal destiny...

He seemed to feel close beside him a comforting Presence, and he thought he heard with an inner ear a Voice which said, "Come. We will start life all over again without the habits that have spoiled it. Trust me. I will keep you." 'Twas the Master, and down into the depths of hell there groped a Hand - a nail-pierced Hand - which found the man it sought and lifted him out. The miracle was performed.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Out Of The Depths: The Life Story of Henry F. Milans, by Clarence Hall. 1935.

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[SLIDE: RETURNING]

**READER 1: 1 CORINTHIANS 15:50-58**

I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory."

"Where, O death, is your victory?

Where, O death, is your sting?"

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

**READER 2:**

Henry Milans' new life was incredible to witness. He was **returning** to hope. He was experiencing the joys of being 'born-again'. Henry went back into the printing business but this time in a humble little print shop. When his boss handed over a few dollars to Henry, his very first pay, he was expecting to never see Henry again. But to his surprise, Henry showed up the next day, completely sober and ready for work. Henry's life got better each and everyday. Though he was tempted on a few occasions, he never touched alcohol again. His career soared to new heights. He even reunited with his wife, Susan, who never stopped praying for him.

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As good as all this was, the best part of Henry's new relationship with God was a burning desire to reach out to other alcoholics and tell them that there is new life in Jesus Christ! He returned to the back alley slums of New York City, not to socialize with his former friends but to save them! He returned as a soldier of The Salvation Army and with the same effort he once put into drinking, he now put into soul winning, becoming an evangelist known all over the United States.

**READER 1:**

Paul in his letter to the Corinthians said "I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable."<sup>3</sup> Henry Milans, a sinner before God, could not ever hope to enter heaven on his own. He was dead in his sins, completely perishable, until he reached out to the nail scarred hands of Jesus Christ, and like the thief on the cross said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."<sup>4</sup> At that moment, the perishable became imperishable, and as Paul says, "When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: 'Death has been swallowed up in victory.'

**READER 3:**

Jesus' death on the cross and his resurrection from the dead was the biggest victory this world has ever seen. The power of Jesus Christ, to give new life to sinners - life after death, yes, but also a transformed life here and now, is the biggest single victory that can be achieved for us. In Christ we have our victory, amen? There is a theology today that seems to emphasize the brokenness of humanity. It stresses that God loves us in our brokenness and that we can come

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<sup>3</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:50

<sup>4</sup> Luke 23:42

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before God just as we are. This is absolutely true. In fact, the only way to come before God is just as we are. But God wants to do more than just help us to live in our brokenness. He wants to take the brokenness and make something new! And if that were not enough - God wants to equip you to live a life of victory. You can have victory in your life, each and every day. You can stand firm in the face of life's obstacles and claim victory in Jesus Christ, hallelujah! That's what Easter is about! We serve a victorious Christ so we in turn can live victorious lives.

**READER 2:**

This must be said. The world often promotes victory as the taking of something away from someone else. "To the victor, goes the spoils", the familiar saying goes. The world promotes victory as the notion of winning or always coming up on top. The victor is strong, the loser is weak. But that's not true victory. True victory is best shown in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, the same Jesus who clothed himself in meekness and humility.

Jesus Christ had victory through living. By healing the sick, feeding the hungry, and teaching the disciples he demonstrated to people what the coming Kingdom of God was all about.

Jesus Christ had victory through dying. It was for the atonement of our sins that he chose to be crucified on the cross.

Jesus Christ had victory through his burial. Ephesians 4:9 reveals the great mystery of his descent into hell to offer salvation to those already dead in their sins.

Jesus Christ had victory through his rising. Death had truly been defeated!

And Jesus Christ will have victory through his returning!

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**READER 1:**

On the day of Christ's returning we will see this victory played out like never before. Paul tells us, "We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed - in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed!"<sup>5</sup> Our victorious Christ is returning; how will we go forward in victory during these final days?

**READER 2:**

Henry Milans was forever changed as a result of his encounter with Christ that evening in a crowded Salvation Army hall in 1910. Thinking about the years of his life that he wasted he promised that he would make the remaining years count. He would go forward in victory by spending the rest of his days, seeking out those who were enslaved to alcohol to tell them, "I found victory in Jesus Christ; you can have victory too!"

No matter what temptations we struggle with, sin is sin! There is not one type of sin or struggle that is better, or worse than any other. As Henry's life prior to his conversion demonstrated, all sin is bondage. Today there are still people in bondage to drugs and addictions. Today there are still people in bondage to selfishness. Today there are still people in bondage to negativity, insecurity, and a fearful mindset that compels them to be unloving toward their fellow human beings. God's word promises us that if we truly put our faith in Jesus Christ, repent of our sins, and ask the Holy Spirit to dwell within us, then not only will we be free from sin's bondage - we will also have a life of victory!

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<sup>5</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:52

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**READER 1:**

You can have victory over sin. 1 John 5:4 says "...for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith."

**READER 2:**

We are part of a worldwide movement that began as a fledgling mission in the East End of London. There was nothing about our humble origins that suggests we would ever succeed. But God gave William and Catherine Booth victory through their faith, and as a result countless lives were changed. We are still part of that movement and we thank God for its legacy, but God wants a Salvation Army victorious for today, amen! God wants soldiers ready for battle, ready to go forward in victory to tell others about His kingdom!

Just like those early officers who spread out to the vast corners of New York City to gather people off the street, to introduce them to the Savior, where is God calling us to go? Who is God calling us to gather? Maybe it's that neighbor who we always chat with across the fence? Maybe it's that colleague who trusts us, sharing her personal stories about her life because she knows that our faith sets us apart. Maybe it's a total stranger that we encounter and God says to us in that still, small voice, "Tell them something about me!"

**READER 3:**

In the days that lie ahead of us until our Lord's return, we will wait for that day by going forward in victory. We will wait for that day by having victory over our sins! We will wait for that day by loving our neighbor. We will wait for that day by serving the needs of others in a hurting world. We will wait for that day by sharing the Gospel, by pointing people towards the cross - the ultimate symbol of our victory. Let us pray.

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**READER 1: PRAYER**

Heavenly Father. We thank you that we serve a victorious King. We thank you for Jesus' victory over sin and death and because of His victory, we can live life victoriously through Him! Help us Lord to share this victory with others. Help to show others that every obstacle can be overcome if a person puts their trust in God. Help us Lord, as the Apostle Paul said, to "Stand firm. Let nothing move us. May we always give ourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because we know that our labor in the Lord is not in vain." Help us Jesus as your Salvation Army, to go forward in victory. Amen.