

**AYOUTH ON A LEDGE@**  
Evangelist Johnnie Lavender  
Jn. 3:16

A short time ago, the mild disorder of Boston's downtown traffic was turned into pandemonium by the wild scream of a woman who raced into the middle of the street and pointed frantically at the swaying figure of a young man perched precariously on the ledge of a hotel window nine floors above. According to Time magazine, which later reported the incident, the young man's name was Louis Turini and he was a boy who had not learned to adjust himself to the rigors of army life.

But there was more to it than that. Louis had grown up in the slums, where life is cheap and the dignity of man is a tragic mockery. The divorce of his parents had kindled the fires of insecurity which gripped him, and now he had become enveloped in a holocaust of complexities and uncertainties common to our times.

As he teetered on the ledge, high above the street, a curious crowd began to gather. Louis knew that he was not ready to die; in fact, he would like to live if only he could be sure it was worthwhile. Men and women came to the window close to where the youth was standing and pleaded with him to change his mind. A salesman, a bellhop, a detective and a mother with a blind baby all urged him to live. The detective said softly, "Come in." Louis answered, "Why should I?"

On the concrete pavement below 10,000 spectators looked up at the solitary figure in this strange drama. "As time passed," reports the magazine, "an excited nervous tension seemed to build up among the craning throng. 'Jump,' they yelled. Yes, believe it or not, for more than an hour the crowd chanted morbidly, 'Jump! Jump!' One girl said, 'I'm the gory type. I want to see him jump.'"

Finally, the minister of a Boston church stepped to the window and began talking quietly to the

bewildered boy. For a time the youth wavered between life and death. Then, after what seemed like years, Louis made his decision and he scrambled through the window into the room.

When I read that story in Time magazine, it struck me that here was an incident symbolic of the dilemma facing modern youth. Oh, most of us have never gone so far as to climb out onto a physical ledge nine floors up, but all of us have faced the frustrations of a world gone mad that has placed us on a ledge no less real over a precipice no less destructive.

Political confusion, rising taxes, curtailed freedom, mounting inflation, continued war and national immorality has enveloped us in a fog of uncertainty and surrounded us with an abyss of destruction and despair. Our young men, still in their teens, are trained to be master killers and asked to die before they have learned the meaning of life and how to live. As Alfred Lord Tennyson said, ATheirs is not to reason why, theirs is but to do and die.@ No wonder youth stands on a ledge ready to jump. Their elders have made a mess of the world and the rising generation sees little promise for tomorrow except economic and social chaos.

A few days ago there came to my desk a copy of a letter from a Veteran of WWII. This is what he writes, AMy name is John Crown. I am a paraplegic at Halloran General Hospital. My physical wounds are very small in comparison to my spiritual wounds. I have come back from death to a world that I no longer care about. I, who have been engaged in the great struggle to save the world from tyranny, and have seen my comrades die for this cause, can now find no peace in the world or in my country.

AHaving lived close to death for two years, the reasons why there is no peace seem infinitesimally flimsy. Russia wants the Dardanelles, Yugoslavia wants Trieste, the Moslems want India, labor wants more wages, capital wants more profits, Smith wants to pass the car in front of me, Junior wants more spending money. To these I say, is it necessary to kill and cripple human beings for these petty games? Anyone who thinks the human body is so cheap it can be traded for a tract of land, a piece of silver or a few minutes of time on the freeway should be forced to listen to the

moans of the dying night and day for the rest of his life.

¶All the troubles of the world originate in the common man. The selfish and greedy ways of nations are just the ways of each individual man multiplied a hundredfold. When the morals of the common man drop, so do the morals of the nations of the world. As long as our individual morals remain at a low end, so will be the world.®

This young man shattered in body by the great god Mars, has seen through the sham and hypocrisy of our age. He has found the taproot of our tree of evil and he sees it for what it really is -- sin.

What's the answer? Where is there salvation for a fellow or gal standing on the edge of the precipice of life wondering which way to jump? If sin is the cause, what is the cure? Young people, there is a brief statement in the New Testament which makes it clear there *is* a solution to the problem of sin. It shows that ¶getting off the ledge® is a very simple matter. I want you to listen to it carefully. For this verse is the Gospel in miniature.

There are people who say they do not know enough about the Bible to be saved. Young people, all you need to know to become a Christian is found in this one verse. It is God's little Bible. John 3:16, ¶For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have eternal life.®

What a glorious statement that is. It begins with God and ends with eternal life, and you **B** whosoever -- are in the middle. This great verse tells us two things about God and two things about people. It says that God loved the world and gave his Son. And then it declares that the person who believes in Christ shall not perish but have eternal life.

Notice that it begins with God. For just as Moses, who penned the sacred story of creation in Genesis 1 by stating ¶In the beginning God,® so too, John, inspired by the Holy Spirit, took pen and parchment, and in telling the matchless story of redemption writes ¶For God--®

John 3:16 begins where Genesis 1:1 begins -- in God. And beloved, there is a reason. For without God there is no creation and without God there is no redemption.

Go back to the beginning and there your seeking heart will find the heart of God. Suppose you were given the first three words of the Bible -- AIn the beginning@-- and the next word was left blank. Try as hard as you may, search as far as you will, seek as long as you can, and you will find no other word to fill the void but the word the Bible uses -- God. Someone has said, ATry any other word and see how you get along.

In the beginning -- protoplasm. And the question comes, >Who made it?=-

In the beginning law. And the question comes, >Who framed it?=-

In the beginning nothing and the answer comes, >From nothing, nothing is made.-@

Young people, it is either God or nothing, and Awith nothing we will have nothing to do.@

AIn the beginning God.@ Young people, from that very first hour of creation, God, with his great heart aching with love for a lost and sinning world has sought to reveal himself to you. Through creation God has revealed himself to you in space. Through the Bible God has revealed himself to you in language. Through Jesus Christ, God has revealed himself to you in human flesh.

AGod so loved the world.@ Can there be any doubt of that? Young people, listen to me, there never was a moment in his lifetime -- the lifetime of God -- that he did not love you. His love is eternal. It is like a circle: without beginning and without end.

Dr. Robert L. Moyer says,

AYou may go back beyond a time when a wave beat upon the shore, or a star shown in the sky or the leaf of a tree fluttered in the breeze, or an angel worshiped before the throne, and when you get back as far as the human mind can reach, you will be no nearer than the beginning of God's love for you than you are right now. If you project your mind into the future to the time when the

mountains have molded into dust, out beyond the time when the sun has grown cold and the stars are old and the leaves of the judgement book unfold, you will be no nearer the end of God's love than you are right now.@

AOh love of God, how rich and pure  
How measureless and strong  
It shall forever more endure  
The saints and angels song.@

AGod so loved the world that he gave his son.@ Henry Ward Beecher once said, AWe never know how much one loves us until we know how much he is willing to suffer for us; it is the suffering element that measures love.@

Henry Ward Beecher was right. Young people, if you would know how much God loves you look at Calvary. There you will see the extent to which God's love would go to save your soul. Someone has said that if you could climb a ladder into heaven and mount the embattlements of glory and say to Gabriel and the angels, AHow much did God love the world?@they would fold their wings in wonder and reply, AGod so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son.@

God gave his son. Not the silver and the gold of the earth which are his. Such a gift would have cost him nothing. Not the cattle on a thousand hills which are his, for that would have cost him less. But God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son and that cost him everything. And yet how cold and callous are the hearts of people toward God's love. How many there are who brazenly deny him, actively resist him or passively ignore him.

A friend was trying to lead a young soldier to accept the Savior. AThere, lad, read the words for yourself,@he said, pointing to John 3:16. The young soldier read slowly, AFor God so loved the world that his gave his --@and there he hesitated, stumbling a bit at the next word. Whether the light was bad or his sight was poor I don't know, but he then continued AHe gave his only-- his only-- his only forgotten son.@ The friend who was with him interrupted, AStop, lad, you've got it

wrong.@ And then he paused, for he suddenly realized that the soldier boy had stumbled on an awful truth. AHis only forgotten son.@ How tragically true it is that for thousands of people today God's only begotten son has become God's forgotten son.

The love of money, of material gain, of fleshly indulgences has lulled the world into a stupor of senselessness and drugged it with the opiate of apathy and unconcern, until this, Son of heaven, this faithful Savior, has become Athe forgotten son.@ Oh young people, I pray that none of you shall ever grow so cold and calloused as to forget this suffering Savior. Never turn your eyes from the scene of sacrifice that cursed the hill of Calvary.

Behold, the Lord of life dying for the damned. See the cruel cross upon his torn and bleeding shoulders. Watch the mocking masses as they spit upon him, stone him, scorn him with their curses. See them take the nails and drive them through his tortured, quivering flesh. Watch him hanging there. See him writhe in anguish. Behold his agony, his suffering and his shame. This is Jesus. This is the son of God. This is the rose of Sharon, the star of heaven, the joy of God's aching heart. What is he doing here? Why is he dying here? Young people, he is dying for you.

Think of it, as Moyer says, AJesus was crowned with thorns that you might be crowned with glory. He was stripped of his raiment that you might be robbed in righteousness. He was mocked that you might be honored. He was reviled that you might be blessed. He was numbered with the transgressors that you might be numbered with the redeemed. He went to the depths of degradation that you might be raised to the height of glory. He suffered the sting of death that you might not perish but have everlasting life.@

God loved the world and gave his son. Have you accepted him? Have you received him? Have you known him, loved him, served him? Oh, once you know him, you will never forget him.

AThey tried to take you from me.

They said you were but an idol myth,

A delusion and a childish superstition;

When I prayed they mocked me,

And when I worshiped you they called me mad.

But, oh my Master, I have met you and I know!  
I have heard your voice in the stillness of the night  
And in the infinite silence I have beheld your glory;  
In the hour of pain I have felt your comforting hand.  
How can I doubt you whom I know?

They tried to take you from me.  
They proved in learned discourse that you never were;  
They told me I was simple, and that you were but an empty dream;  
*Scientific proof* they gave, and spoke wise words I could not understand;  
They ridiculed and scoffed and laughed.  
But, oh my Master, he that once has met you cannot doubt.  
He that once has felt your holy presence cannot question more.  
Though they are blind, yet I have seen your splendor;  
Though they are deaf, yet I have heard your voice.  
How can I doubt you whom I know?@(Anonymous.)

AFor God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believeth in him,  
should not perish but have eternal life.@

Merv Rosell tells the story of the great organ in Freiburg, Germany. So magnificent was this instrument that on the day it was completed it was acclaimed to be one of the wonders of the world. A special caretaker was commissioned to guard it carefully.

One day the old custodian was summoned by a knock at the chapel door. When he opened the door, he found a young stranger, weary and dirty from the dust of many miles of travel. At first the custodian thought the young man wanted food and shelter. ACan I give you food to eat and a

place to sleep?" he asked.

The young man shook his head. "No, I do not come asking for food or shelter. I come to make a great request of you. Sir, I would like to have the key so that I might play the Freiburg Organ."

The custodian raised his faithful old hands in horror and said, "I can't allow that. Only the great masters are allowed to play this instrument. If I should permit your hands to soil its keys I would lose my position and my honor."

The young stranger pleaded with the old man who held the organ keys and then finally, seeming to have failed, he turned to leave. The stoop in his shoulders and look of dejection in his face got to the heart of the old custodian who tottered after him and said, "All right son, all right. If you promise never to tell a soul that I allowed your unknown fingers to play the Freiburg Organ, I will give you the key."

The young man promised and the old custodian led him down the aisle. The young man slipped into place with surprising ease, turned the key in the lock and pushed back the cover of the precious organ. Merv Rosell describes how, a moment, his fingers hovered over the keys almost afraid to touch them for fear of harming them. The custodian went back to his dusting but he did not dust for long. For suddenly the organ burst into song like a bird released from long confinement, as the sensitive fingers of the young stranger moved over black and white manuals and stops, leaving a melody that held the caretaker in tranced.

Moments, musical moments spun by, painting the sunsets of every season until the soul of the young artist lay exhausted and satisfied. Then his ears called his eyes away from the beloved instrument to the form of the old custodian kneeling beside him. "Who are you and what is your name that you should play this organ so magnificently?" "Oh, it matters little. It matters not at all. But if you wish to know, my name is Felix Mendelssohn." "Oh what have I done?" cried the custodian. "The master of the organ was here and I withheld the key."



Beloved, have you kept the Master from your heart strings? Have you withheld the key? Have you prohibited him from touching the manual of your eternal soul? Don't deny him anymore. Receive God's Son into your heart and the moment you do, you will be off the Aledge@of indecision. Your feet will be firmly planted on Jesus, the Solid Rock. You will begin to really live. And Christ will fill your heart with song which will never die.