

ATHE VANTAGE POINT OF YOUTH@

Evangelist Johnnie Lavender

Gen. 13:14-18

It was close to midnight as I walked along the main street of a town where I was holding a crusade. I was on my way to my hotel room after the evening service. Several people had responded to the invitation and, by the time I had counseled with them all about their great decision, it was very late.

I stopped at a corner newsstand to buy the morning paper and as I glanced over the magazines in the rack one of them caught my eye. It showed the picture of a little, curly haired boy about four years old. He was looking wistfully into the distance. His arms were folded thoughtfully and there was something about his whole mood and manner which was very striking. Beneath the picture was this caption, "America's Last Hope For The Future."

Only six words. But those six words captured a whole realm of truth. "America's Last Hope For The Future." That night, as I stood on that street corner, my eyes fixed on the picture of that little boy, I came face to face with the fact that America's hope does not lie in her great military leaders. It does not lie in her statesmen. It does not lie in her educators. It does not lie in her engineers, builders, philosophers, social leaders, politicians and financiers. Nor does it lie in the parents of this present generation.

"America's Last Hope For The Future" does not lie in any of these who have made and molded our world these many years. They have had their chance. And the silent acres of white crosses on Iwo Jima and Guadal Canal, the battle-scarred beaches of France and Italy are testimony to the measure of their success.

The shattered shambles of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the gaping mouths of little babes withered and weak from hunger, the twisted forms of men and women caught in the clutches of that demon

alcohol, the broken homes and empty churches, the crumbling world powers and tottering social systems, the fear and frenzy which are gripping the souls of men and women today are evidence enough that those who have molded and shaped our world these many years have not been God's people, in God's time, working in God's way.

Oh, guys and gals, hear me tonight. America and the world look to you for the final hope for the future. But unless you, in turn, look to God, unless you bind yourself inseparably to Jesus, unless you let loose of Satan and the hoards of hell, unless you crucify self and sin in your life, America and the world will look in vain. Yes, youth with its passions and powers *is* the hope for the future, but it must be youth with and for Christ!

In our preaching missions across the length and breadth of this land, we have seen scores of guys and gals respond to the Savior's invitation. And always there have been those who stood off to the side and whispered piously, "She's only a child." "Why he's just a boy."

Only a child? Praise God, beloved that she *is* only a child. Only a boy? Thanks be to Jesus, he *is* just a boy. For hear me, beloved, when a decision is made for Christ in the prime of youth, not only is a soul saved, a life is won. A life with its time and talents. A life with its opportunities and powers. A life with all it has to offer. A life God can bless and use and direct.

One night D.L. Moody returned to his home following a meeting and his wife asked how things had gone? "Wonderfully," Mr. Moody replied, "we had two and a half converts." "Do you mean two men and a boy," his wife asked? "No," Mr. Moody replied, "two boys and a man."

There's the secret. There's the hope for the future. For youth without Christ is paradise lost. It's no better than what already exists. But youth with Christ and for Christ is a power, which if put to the test, can capture this whole generation for Jesus.

So I preach to Christian youth this evening and I urge you to heed the challenge, the urgent and

thrilling summons of your God as it is expressed in my text, **ALift up now thine eyes and look from the place where thou art, northward, southward, eastward and westward, and all the land which thou seest will I give unto thee.**@

If I were a teenager today, I would very soberly and sincerely listen to God's call for

A Forward Look.

Our text says, **ALook from the place where thou art.**@ The other day I was privileged to spend some quality time with my father. Our hectic schedules don't allow us a lot of time together so, when the opportunity presents itself, I try to make the most of it. As he and I chatted that day about the Open Door Rescue Mission he founded and directed for thirty years, dad shared some of his dreams. Some of the things he would like to get done. Some of the goals he would like to accomplish for God. Then he stopped, and with a tear in his eye, he said, **AOh, son, if only I were young again.**@

AIf only I were young again.@ Sometimes, as in the case of my father, we hear those words coming from the lips of people who have given their best to God and still have unfulfilled dreams. Unmet goals. On the other hand, the complainers are often people who look back upon their lives and see time and talents wasted. Opportunities for service cast aside. And now, too late, we hear them say, **AIf only I were young again. How different it would be.**@

Well, young people you need not engage in such words and sadness. You are young still. Before you are the opportunities. Before you are the plans. Before you are the time and youthful vigor to bring them through to completion. You must have a forward look. For you are young still.

ALook from the place where thou art.@ You say, **AJohnnie, where am I tonight? As a Christian young person just where do I stand?**@ Well, it is safe to say that if you are a Christian, if you are a child of God, then at least you are beyond the cross. Behind you is the life of sin. Behind you are the days for service of Satan. Behind you are the cross and the cleansing stream that flows from

Calvary. Yes, if you are a Christian this morning, you are beyond the cross. You stand within the border of the Society of Saints. But believe me, young people, you can't afford to stay there.

I may have told this story before, but I love to tell it because it is so expressive of what I am trying to say. I don't know where I first heard it. It must have been when I was very young, because it has been with me nearly all my life.

It's about a little boy whose parents had the happy habit of putting him to bed and listening to his prayers each evening. One night, after he had said his night-night prayers, they went down stairs and were talking over the things of the day. About an hour later they heard a thud on the floor, they ran upstairs and found their little lad climbing sleepily into bed. As the father tucked his little boy under the covers he said, "Son, how did you fall out of bed?" The little boy was almost back into dreamland and he rubbed his eyes sleepily and said, "Well, I don't know, daddy, I guess I stayed too close to where I got in."

You know, I think that's the trouble with far too many Christians. Whether we are young Christians or old Christians, we've stayed too close to where we got in. Instead of looking forward to a life of crusading for Christ, we were satisfied to be just under the covers. Just inside the fold, as it were, spiritually speaking. And soon, the tug of the old habits and habitations became too much for us to bear and we began casting wistful glances over our shoulders at the past "winking at the world" and before we realized it, we are out of fellowship with Christ.

Oh, we didn't lose our salvation. That's impossible. You don't gain salvation by works and you cannot lose it by works. But oh, young people, it is possible to lose your power. It is possible your victory. It is possible to lose the sense of joy and peace and contentment which comes from real Christian living. And, if I were a teenager today I would very soberly and sincerely listen to God's call for a forward look. You cannot be satisfied for the mere quantity of life that you have in Christ. You must strive for that glorious new quality of life you can have through Christ. You must look forward to a life of service.

And that brings me to my second point, for if I were a teenager today I would listen to God's call for

An Outward Look.

Our text says: Look from the place where thou art, northward, southward, eastward and westward, and all the land which thou seeth will I give unto thee.

There is only one limitation to this promise from God -- all of the promises of God -- it is the limitation that you place upon it yourself. God says here that he will give you the world if you will only take it. He will give you what? As much as you see! In other words, your conquest for Christ will be limited to the degree of your vision. If you see much, if you believe much, if you attempt much, then God will give you much. But the Bible says, without a vision the people perish. God is not in the business of doing big things through small people of little vision.

Young people, the time to begin reaching out for Christ is while you are young. God is always working through young people.

Thomas Helwys was scarcely 30 years old when he became the founder of the First Baptist Church in England.

Roger Williams was no older when he established the historic Rhode Island Colony and laid down the great principle, For any man to be punished for any matter of his conscience is persecution.

Adoniram Judson was 24, Anne Haseltine, his heroic wife, only 23, when they went to India as missionaries.

Hudson Taylor began his work in China at the age of 21.

Charles Wesley composed some of his greatest hymns when he was still in his teens.

John Stone was only 26 when he gave the world that stirring hymn, The Church's One

Foundation Is Jesus Christ Her Lord.

Abel, Jacob, Joseph, Gideon, Samuel, Sampson, David, Daniel, John the Baptist, John the Beloved, Mark, Stephen were all young men who took an outward look in their youth.

Christ himself was young. As a matter of fact, he was seven years my senior when he died upon the cross.

God needs young people with an outward look. With a world vision. With a pioneering spirit. And he needs them now. Some of you are searching for a purpose in life. A reason for living. A goal toward which to strive. Well, I know of no better reason for living, no more satisfying aim in life, no greater purpose to which you could give yourself than to reach outward into the lives of other people with the message of Jesus Christ.

When Robert Hutchins was at the University of Chicago, he was teaching a class in history one day. In the course of his lecture he asked the class, "What has been the greatest force for good in history?" The students called out their answers: Democracy. The printing press. The wheel. Fire. Dr. Hutchins rejected them all and turning to the blackboard he wrote one word, Martyrdom. Then he turned to his student and said, "People who die for what they believe give immortality to their ideas and inspire the rest of us to greatness. If you want to become important to this world, be a martyr. Give yourself away."

Well, it isn't necessary that you die for Christ to fulfill God's call for an upward look. In fact, it strikes me that the great need of the world today is for young people who will endure a kind of living martyrdom -- who will give themselves away for something greater than themselves -- who will give themselves away for the cause of Christ and for the sake of others.

Young people, you'd be surprised how many of your friends are going thru life without any aim or ambition. They are not happy. They are filled with uncertainty and frustration and fear. When they see a guy or gal who knows what life is all about and, in some wholesome way, is enjoying

life to the hilt -- they are impressed! When they see someone who lives, not for himself or herself but for others -- who is literally giving himself or herself away -- they are willing to listen to what that kind of person has to say.

And, young people, you will be happily surprised when you discover the tremendous power you can be in blessing others if you simply let the joy of salvation flow into every facet of your life.

I do not mean to suggest you must become a missionary or a minister -- although God desperately needs young men and women -- who in obedience to the outward look will give their lives to Christ in a church-related profession. But he also needs Christian salesmen. Pipe fitters. Filing clerks. Dress designers. Secretaries. Businessmen. What he wants is your life. Nothing more is necessary, and nothing less will do. He wants to take you where you are, be that at home or in the office, in the shop or at school, and he wants to use you to do a task that no one else but you can do.

That's what I mean when I say if I were a teenager I would obey God's command to take an outward look. All about you are fields that are ripe unto harvest. There are areas of life that desperately need Christian influence. There are people that need your friendship. Your love. Your Christian concern.

Yes, young people, God needs you. He needs your life. Your present and your future. Young men, God needs your passion and your power. Young woman, God needs your personality and your presence. God needs young people with an outward look -- a world vision -- a pioneering spirit. The days of conquest are not past. The statement is still true that: AThe world has yet to see what God can do with one young man or woman who is completely yielded to his will.@ How about it, young fellow? Will you be that man? How about it, young lady? Will you be that woman? Will you adjust your vision, your sight, to encompass the world? Will you heed God's command to take an outward look? Will you attempt something really big for God?

And then, if I were a teenager today I would be especially conscience of God's call to

An Upward Look.

Our text says: Lift up now thine eyes and look . . . And, young people, there is the secret of your strength. There is the place you must turn for power. For the forward and the outward looks will wither and fade away into nothing unless empowered with an upward look.

When Yogi Berra came up with the Yankees, they really didn't know what to do with him. His legs were too short to be an outfielder. He was too clumsy to be a good infielder. But he was such a terrific hitter they thought they had to use him. So they decided to make a catcher out of him.

But he had trouble handling wild pitches and was charged with a lot of pass balls. They got Bill Dickey, one of the greatest catchers of all time, to coach him and, throughout the season he developed until eventually Yogi Berra led the Yankees into the World Series where he caught flawlessly without a single pass ball.

After the World Series some reporters were talking to him about this and they said, Yogi, how did you overcome the problem of wild pitches so easily? Yogi said, Whenever I saw a bad ball coming I remembered something my coach said, >When you see a wild pitch coming, get down on your knees.

Young people, if you take Christ seriously -- if you dedicate yourself to the forward and upward looks -- then life will hand you a good many wild pitches. There will be times of temptation. There will be periods of tribulation. There will be hours of loneliness. If you try to tackle them alone, you will go down to defeat. But if you get down on your knees -- and look up -- you'll find a great big smile of reassurance in your Savior's face.

You see young people, Jesus understands your struggles. He understands your trials and your

temptations, because he, too, was young.

A poet has put it this way --

ABecause he, too, was young, he knows each snare
along the way. He knows what youth must dare!
He, too in Nazareth's narrow little street
Found hidden nets to trip his youthful feet.
And such forbidden music as you hear
Fell, strangely alluring on the young Christ's ear.

AThe broad way then, as now was gay with song,
And laughter; and the straight way lone and long.
The same foes lurked beside his humble way:
That thwart the golden dreams of youth today;
And all the dark temptations that you know
He was acquainted with long, long ago.

ATell him your longing! He will bend to hear:
Bring him your heartaches! And the skies will clear
And share your dreams with him! He speaks the
Tongue of youth. He, too, was eager, glad and young!
Tell him! He is a comrade, loyal and true,
Whom you can trust in all you think or do.@

How about it, fellows and girls? Does the challenge of the forward look -- does the call of the upward look -- seem too much for you to bear? Do you feel insufficient to the task? Are you afraid to try for fear of failing?

Then, accept God's call to the upward look. Lift up your eyes, and, looking unto Jesus, you'll hear him say --

AFear thou not for I=I be with thee,
I will still thy pilot be,
Never mind the tossing pillows,
Here, take my hand and trust in me.@