

Series: Friends Indeed

Week 3: Life Links

Mark 2:3-4

July 28, 2002 • Sunday 9:15 AM • Dr. David McKinley

[Praise and worship led by Rick Briscoe]

[Dr. McKinley, Welcome]

[Soft music] Well, I don't know about you, I wondered if Matthew might walk on the water instead of go under the water. But that was, ah, that was so wonderful, ah, to see these two following Christ in baptism and at the close of the service today as a part of our invitation we are going to extend an opportunity to you that if you have prayed to receive Christ as your Lord and Savior and would want to follow Him in the testimony of faith, believer's baptism, we'll invite you to come and we'll schedule you at the next available opportunity so that you too can follow Christ and show your love and obedience to Him. I want to bring a word of greeting and welcome to each and every one of you who've come to this place and worship today. We are so thankful that you've come to worship here with us at Prestonwood. On behalf of our pastor, Dr. Jack Graham and the entire Prestonwood family it is my privilege to say to you, welcome! And so it is our prayer today that God would use this day, this gathering in a very significant way in your life. Our pastor is continuing a time of vacation, a time away. I trust that you are praying for him, for Deb and these days that they are away and if you have not done so please be sure to stop by the atrium and pick up a copy of the *Pastor Prayer Guide* that was provided in the new role of leadership that God has assigned to him as President of The Southern Baptist Convention and of course just in praying for him in the ongoing leadership responsibilities of the life and the ministry of the church here at Prestonwood. I'm so grateful to involve my own life, ministry and partnership with our pastor and a great way in which we can all be a part of this partnership is through prayer. So I hope you'll be praying for him in these days. But let me say one more time to those of you who are guests with us today, you're an answer to prayer. Your coming and worshipping today is what we've prayed for that God would gather not only those who are a part of the family but those who have come seeking, those who have come to find out, those who are in need of encouragement and fellowship and we're trusting that God will use this day in your life. If you'll look inside your worship guide there's not only information about the ministry, there is good information there but there's something very important for any guest who's with us today and that is that there's a guest registration. Would you please take just a few moments to detach that, to fill it out and then to return it in the offering plate in just a little while, letting us know that you were here, letting us know if there's a way that we can respond to a need in your life, we want to be

able to do that today. But right now I simply want to ask that each of us get our hands free. I'm going to ask you to help me, to help me to extend God's love and a greeting to everyone who's here. So right now if you would let's stand together. Let's take time meet and greet our neighbors today, welcome them to this gathering of worship.

[Praise and worship led by Rick Briscoe]

[Dr. McKinley, Offertory Prayer]

[Soft music] Let's pray together. Lord we do thank You today that You give satisfaction to the thirst and the hunger of our hearts and Lord it is that satisfaction that we celebrate. We realize that in each of our lives you have satisfied us with many good things to enjoy and that for most of us life is not only filled with the necessities but with many benefits, many privileges, many extras and so Father as we come to this time of offering and of giving I pray Lord that we would not be happy to just be satisfied of You without satisfying Your desire that we would honor You and obey You by putting you first in the giving of our tithes, of our offerings and of our gifts to You and so Lord right now we seek to bring pleasure to You through showing our faith and our affection as we offer these gifts, the gifts of our lives to You. Father we do pray today thanking you for the many extensions of our ministry, for that team that's in Russia today, ah, and who are there serving of our ladies, for the group that have gone to the Amazon River and who are there ministering among churches and providing for the needs of people, for a group of middle school students who returned last night from being in Alabama and touching and encouraging a community in need. Lord thank You for these points of outreach but O God help us right now to engage ourselves and the resources of our lives for the sake of the kingdom. It is for Your name, for Your glory that we pray these things. Amen. Would you be seated?

[Offertory solo, Michael Chenoweth, Mercy Said No]

[Dr. McKinley, message *Life Links*]

Would you join me in prayer one more time? Father we thank you today that Your mercies are made new every morning and great is your faithfulness and I pray that you would use this moment and this hour as an appointed hour of mercy and grace in each point of need, in each life of those who hear and share in this gathering and in Your word. Thank You for the strength that You give through the power of the Holy Spirit for it is in Jesus' name that we pray. Amen! Amen!

What a beautiful, beautiful testimony in song today and I had the privilege of hearing that last night and enjoyed it then and enjoyed it even again today and I do so appreciate a, the wonderful job that a, we have every time we gather through the music and the worship ministry here at Prestonwood Baptist Church.

A number of years ago I learned a little jingle that goes something like this:

To dwell up above with those that we love, oh that will be glory. But to live here below with those that we know, well, that's a different story. Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!

Would you agree that life lived here is not always easy because people can make my life and your life at times hard, would you agree that that's true? That many times the most difficult thing that we deal with in life are difficult people and, a, I found it interesting just a few days ago to read about a little personal project that an experiential psychologist a, did for himself. He began to ponder the question and to ask, "Why do I like some people and at the same time immediately dislike others?" and it bothered him trying to understand why he was so quick to discriminate between people, some that he liked and was drawn to and others that he disliked and so he decided to do a little bit of a personal project and to make a list of the qualities that he liked and that attracted him to people and of the same qualities that he disliked and that caused him to move away from other people and this is what he came up with. Let me share his list with you.

The 10 major things that he disliked in people; you may identify with a few of these.

#1 A lack of dependability.

He said I really found that I struggled with people that I could not count on.

#2 Grumpiness

Grumpiness! Now let me ask you do you know of anybody who's grumpy. Now don't look at em just lift your hand right now. [pause for congregation laughter] Uh, Ha, ha, ha, ha. You know one of the most ah, displeasing and one of the most, ah, ah, one of the things that causes us to want to distance from other people is when we're around people who are grumpy. We just want to close em in a closet and say, "Just get over it!" And a, so he said he didn't like grumpiness.

#3 He said, "Exaggeration, people who are always building up and blowing out things."

#4 A tendency to show off knowledge, to always act that they know something that you don't know and that they're better than you because of that.

#5 Sarcasm

He said I find that I dislike people who are always sarcastic, who've always got barbs, people who are like porcupines, you can't get close to em cause they, they always got a stick you when you get near them.

He said those who have a sense of inferiority, he said, "One of the things I dislike is when I'm with somebody and their needs continually surface and they're needing me to make them feel significant and feel important and it's that sense of inferiority I just don't want to be in that."

And then he said, "I struggle with people who are bossy, people who are constantly being bossy, just bossing people around."

#8 He said, "I struggle with people being critical and finding fault, who always want to tell you what's wrong here, in this situation." And then...

#9 He said, "I find that I dislike people who are always poking fin... fun behind the backs of others." I guess because he knows that if they do it behind the backs of others, they do it behind your back and so as a result a, he said, "I don't like that kind of person." And then...

#10 He said, "I [fi...] find that the 10th quality that causes me not to like people is that they have a desire to dominate others, they always want to take charge and be in the lead and only to have their opinion expressed and only their perspective seen." And he said, "These are the 10 things that I dislike in people and frankly I find them to be irritating."

Now I'm sure if I took time this morning that each of us could come up with our own list of things that irritate me about others and we could even write names beside each one of these. But I don't want us to focus on the things that irritate others I want to talk to you about the things that attract others to our lives.

I've been talking together on Sunday's about a little sermon series entitled, *Friends Indeed*. And we've been talking about what it is in my life, in your life, the characteristics that are endearing and that allow our lives to count both in time and for eternity because of our relationship with God and our relationship with others and so I want us to look at one of the most endearing pictures of friendship that you find in the Bible, it's found in Mark chapter 2, the 2nd gospel, Mark chapter 2 and I want us to read together an account, a picture of something that happened as a result of the endearing quality of friendship one day in the life, in the ministry of our Savior Jesus Christ. Mark chapter 2 and I'm gonna begin reading in verse 1:

¹And again He, [that is Jesus] entered Capernaum after some days, and it was heard that He was in the house. [And] ²Immediately many gathered together, so that there was no longer room to receive them, not even near the door. And He [that is Jesus] preached the word to them. ³Then they came to Him, bringing a paralytic who was carried by four men. ⁴And when they could not come near the house because of the crowd, they uncovered the roof where he was. So when they had broken through, they let down the bed on which the paralytic was lying. [And] ⁵When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, "**Son, your sins are forgiven you.**" ⁶And some of the scribes sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, [thought] ⁷"Why does this Man speak blasphemies like this? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" ⁸But immediately, Jesus when he perceived in His spirit that they reasoned thus within themselves, He said to them, "**Why do you reason about these things in your hearts?**" ⁹"Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your

sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Arise, take up your bed and walk'?"
¹⁰*"But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins"—He said to the paralytic, ¹¹"I say to you arise, take up your bed, and go to your house."¹²[And] Immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went out in the presence of them all, so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, "We never saw anything like this!"*

Now give me just a moment having read that passage to put it all in perspective for each of us today. The picture here is a very beautiful and a very serene picture. It occurs in a place called Capernaum. Capernaum is on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee in the land of Israel and Capernaum in many ways is a part of the hill country area there in the northern part of Israel. If you've been to the hill country area here in the Austin area you know how the hills just sort of move and roll and yet there they move upward till you get to Mount Herman about 40 miles north of there, which, is the highest point of elevation in the land of Israel. But there around the Sea of Galilee there are gentle rolling hills that come right down to the shore line and the significant thing about the place called Capernaum it is here that Jesus began His ministry. Matthew chapter 4 tells us that when Jesus had been tempted of the Holy Spirit and stood a, a, had been tempted of the Devil and then led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness that ultimately He did not go back to His boyhood town of Nazareth but He went and He began His ministry in the place called Capernaum. It is also here that Jesus called His first disciples, Andrew and his brother Simon Peter and interestingly enough the city of Capernaum was the home place of Simon Peter and so through out the life in the ministry of Jesus you find that there are a number of, *Life Links*, to this place, to this community called Capernaum. In fact when I've taken groups to Israel, to the Holy Land one of my favorite things to do is to go to the ancient remains of a synagogue there in Capernaum because the Bible tells us that on one occasion Jesus went to that synagogue and taught there in Capernaum. It is a very beautiful place to visit. But while we get the picture of this beautiful picturesque community on the shores of Galilee in the hill country, on this particular day there is a problem and the problem is that people know that Jesus has come, to hav, hav, that Jesus came to Capernaum and as a result people began to spread the word and from everywhere they came and in just a short while the house was filled, shoulder to shoulder with people who had gathered to hear Jesus preach. I don't know when the last time was that you were in a very crowded place, it may be that if you've done any traveling this summer that you may have been through an airport and in some of the regions of the country right now, a, there's still this challenge of going through the check-in and the security and you literally can just stand for an hour as though it were just moving inches trying to move through the process at times and sometimes you just feel overwhelmed by the crowd. Maybe you went to some of the 4th of July festivities held around the Dallas, Fort Worth area and some of them were very large and you can remember what it was like to just be shoulder-to-shoulder caught up in the crowd. Well, on this particular day when Jesus went into the house there were so many people there you could not move and even along the doorways and the window areas people had gathered and so there was just no other room and the other

problem was not only the crowd but there was a man and this man was a paralytic. We don't know the full extent of, of his physical condition we simply know he could not walk. It may have been that he was a quadriplegic, that he literally had virtually no movement, or use of the limbs and the members of his body. But what we do know is that this was a different day and time and there wasn't a handicapped space reserved and there wasn't a handicapped section to sit in and the result was that this man was left out. But the beauty of the picture is that four friends, we don't know their names, we just know that there were four friends who determined that they had to get their friend to Jesus and so they came up with a creative plan and the plan that they came up with was: If we can't get in the room we'll get him down through the roof! And so I want you to imagine just for a moment what it must have been like for Jesus to have been preaching and teaching in that house and people were looking at Him just like you're looking at me and then all the sudden some debris started to fall from over their heads. Suddenly there began to be a little bit of daylight coming through and then the next thing they knew this man was being lowered down through the roof right into the middle of the room. Well, you know what they say; when there's an elephant in the middle of the room you have to deal with it and the reality was you couldn't get around this. Jesus couldn't just move over to this side and try to focus them. The man had literally come right into the presence of Jesus and yet in that moment Jesus did what only Jesus could do and that was that Jesus healed this man and when the meeting ended, listen to this, he came in lying on a pallet but he got up, he took his bed and he walked out the door. It was an incredible day of demonstration of the power and of the strength of Jesus Christ and ultimately what was being pictured in that man was being the picture of what the condition of all mankind is that we've all been crippled by a fall and all of us are in need of the healing, life transforming power of Jesus Christ to move and to work and to be active in every one of our lives. Now I share all of this with you by way of background because of the fact that from the very beginning in this series called, *Friends Indeed*, we've used a little simple definition to sort of outline our perspective on friendship and we've said it over and over. In fact I want you to be sure that you know it and that you say it with me this morning. It simply says this, "A friend in... [pause for slight congregation response] a few of you got it! But this is participatory, did you know that? [pause for slight congregation laughter] This isn't one way! I got the microphone and that's nice but the reality is I need your help so let's be sure that we do it together. **"A friend in need is a friend indeed!"** [Congregation participation] And if that is true what better picture of friends in need than these four friends who were determined to get their friend into the presence of Jesus. Really there was a simple problem, they were on the outside and they needed to get their friend on the inside. In fact that is the ultimate challenge in the ultimate problem that is faced by every believer in every church in every age, how do we get the people on the outside to come into the inside so that they can know and experience the power of Jesus Christ in their lives? That's the most important question that we can ask. How do we get people on the outside to come into the inside? Well, I believe that what happened this day was a beautiful picture of a, *Life Link*, between those

men, those friends and their friend who was in need and by getting him and his need into the presence of Jesus the ultimate result was a miracle that transformed that man's life and I believe that God wants you and God wants me to be a, *Life Link*, with those around us in need so that we can help people on the outside to come inside and to know Jesus Christ.

So I want us to consider today how we can do that and I'm going to simply use the word links, **L - I - N - K - S**, as an acrostic to outline what it takes to be a *Life Link*, to help others in need by being a friend indeed, to help them to know and to experience Christ in their lives. So you might want to jot some notes down and take a few notes today and I hope this will be an encouragement to you.

Number 1 if you and I want to be *Life Links* the first thing that must be true in our lives is that we must...

Love others authentically. We must love others authentically. If this picture pictures anything, it pictures the [beauty] the beauty of love in action. To these men love wasn't simply a noun it was a verb. It was a show and a tell kind of a love and they were absolutely committed to demonstrating their love by picking up their friend and getting him in the presence of Jesus and I would submit to you that the greatest thing that people in my life and in your life need is for our lives to be *Life Links* to the reality of the love of God being expressed through us. Neal Straight said it this way, "*Love is the one ingredient of which the world never tires and of which there is never an abundance. The world will never out grow its need for love.*" Everywhere we look there are people who are searching for love, people who are wanting to experience love and the Bible is a book that is filled with the message of love but it is vital for you and for me that we become the kind of believers who love people authentically. What I mean by that is that we genuinely communicate care for their lives and for their well-being. You see, I'm afraid far too many times when we talk about the need to love the world and to reach our friends for Christ, that far too many times that becomes a, a badge, or as though it were a, an ornament of our own life commitment. But one of the things that will make you a truly winsome witness and will become one of the most endearing qualities in life is when you love others and place value on them because you let God love them through you. What I'm trying to say at this point is this, it's so important that we communicate to people around us. I am not here to show you how committed I am but to show you how much I care about you. Far too many times in our Christian life we put all the performance on us, all the focus on us, all of the reflection on us and our commitment, but if you really want to be a witness for Christ it's not just what you know and what you can say and how you can do it, it's becoming a channel where other people begin to believe that the message of Christ is believable because they feel an authentic believable love being expressed through you. So we are to love others authentically.

Second thing, not only must we love others authentically we must...

Intercede for people, we know, to come to Christ. We must intercede for other people, that we know, to come to Christ. Now I'm the first to admit that no where in this text does the Bible mention anything

about prayer. But while prayer as a practice is not mentioned the principle of prayer is clearly here because the goal of these four friends was to do whatever they had to do to break through into the presence of Jesus to get their friend to Christ and if intercession is anything it is petitioning God on behalf of others, that we know, that have a need and so if these men did anything in this picture they interceded by getting their friend into the very presence of Christ to say, "Oh Jesus, if only he can know you, he can be changed, he can be healed, his life can be different forever." Intercessory prayer will endear your life to other people. When people believe that you pray and know that you know how to pray and believe that you are praying for them it will do something ultimately to impact their lives and to open their hearts to the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and I love this picture because it is a picture of believing prayer, that if we can just get him to Jesus it will make all the difference. Phillips Brooks once said this, "*Prayer is not overcoming God's reluctance but it is laying hold of His highest willingness.*" And these men in their heart believed that no matter how radical their plan may appear to those in the room that if they could just get their friend before Jesus that Jesus would be willing to do something, and He was. What was He willing to do? He was willing to look at the man and say, "*...rise, take up your bed and walk.*" You see that's what endears your life and my life to others, it is when we learn to intercede and to pray and one of the greatest things that we can do for our friends is to pray for our friends and to make the connection between the power of God and the need of their life through intercessory prayer. We're gonna start a new service here at the end of the month of August called the Prestonwood Connection. It's gonna be at 6:45 in the evening on Wednesday nights and Rick Briscoe and I are gonna have the opportunity of teaming up on this service and leading it midweek and one of our primary desires is that this service would be a service that would be electric, not only with worship and praise and teaching but with prayer and that it would begin to be a source of connectedness to what God does here on the weekends and throughout the week because there are a core of people who have gathered and connected and interceded to see God move and work through the life and the ministry of our church and the lives and the ministry of our people. God wants to touch and change our friends and we need to believe it and we need to pray for it. I was reading just a few days ago in a *Discipleship Journal* about an article entitled, *Don't Give Up On Your Family*, and it's the life story of a young lady by the name of Christy Borthwick and her prayer for her father. It said that Christy's dad illustrated vividly the need to persevere and intercede in prayer. It said that with the exception of the Billy Graham Crusade Christy's dad seldom expressed any spiritual interest. In fact for years he aggressively [turned tape]...ing the hypocrisies of the church and the hard to believe content of the Bible. On one occasion they talked about the bad news aspect of the good news that people without Christ go to Hell and he resisted the message so strongly that her father looked at her and said, "If there is a God who allows people to go to Hell then I don't want to go to Heaven to live with Him I want to go to Hell." A few years later after a, the sudden death of Christy's 47 year old brother her dad became even harder and more belligerent and when he was ask if he could, would like to receive God's

gift of eternal life he snapped, quote "Eternal life is just a myth, there's no Heaven, there's no Hell, just put me in the grave, the grave is all there is." But Christy kept praying and praying tenaciously. She called on over 500 of her friends and used e-mail to keep them connected and to ask them to pray for her dad and 2 weeks later her dad finally softened his heart and he indicated an interest in a relationship with God and he, they simply invited him to pray a simple prayer and this was the prayer: "Jesus have mercy!" and he responded and for the first time in his life he said, "Jesus have mercy on my soul!" The account goes that his countenance changed, the struggle that he'd had with God for so many years was over and God answered Christy's prayer after 29 years of praying for her father and two weeks later he went home to be with the Lord. You see ladies and gentlemen we must believe in the power of intercessory prayer and just as these men believed and would not take "no" for an answer they got their friend to the presence of Christ. There's a third thing that I want you to see today and that is not only that we must love others authentically and intercede for people that we know to come to Christ but we must...

Network with other believers. Network with them believing that God is using people and God is using me and God is orchestrating the efforts of all of our lives to make a difference in the lives of those who need Christ. If you've been around the television in the last 24 hours you know that there's been a frantic effort to try to reach a group of miners who had been 290 feet below the surface of the earth. There was a breakthrough late in the evening last night and this morning news reports are showing that all nine of those miners have been recovered and have survived and it's been an incredible story of celebration and yet I thought about how many people had been involved in that rescue effort, how many man hours had been invested, how much energy has gone in and the question is, who ultimately saved those men? The answer is all of them, all of them. It wasn't just the one who had the first touch. It wasn't just the one that had the first communication, it wasn't just the one who touched the first hand, it was all of those hands working in a network together that were used to ultimately save nine lives and I believe that God uses a network just like that, a team, a church so that every time somebody comes to know Christ and is changed for eternity it is because God has done something through the network of the church and it really doesn't matter what part you may have as long as you understand that God can and God will use you. Think about these men! Which one of these men could have said, "I led my friend to Christ and he was healed?" Well, not any one of them, it was all four of them. It didn't matter if you had the front side or the back side, the left side or the right side, the issue was they were all involved in bringing their friend to Christ and what God is looking for is a, life link, mentality in my life and in yours so that we understand it doesn't matter what part in the link of the chain that we may play as long as we are about the business of seeing people linked to Christ and changed for eternity. In a wonderful book entitled, *Give Me An Answer*, Cliff Ketchle says it this way, "A person coming to Christ is like a chain with many links, the first link, the middle link and the last link. There are many influences and conversations that precede a person's

decision to convert to Christ. I know the joy of being the first link at times, a middle link usually and occasionally a last link. God has not called me to be only the last link, He has called me to be faithful and to love all people." Ladies and gentlemen I believe this morning if we can just begin to get that picture and embrace that reality, God will use our lives in the network of the church and through the network of His kingdom to be, *Life Links*, to change peoples lives for eternity. So how are you a life link? Number one, love others authentically. Number two, intercede for others, that you know, to know Christ. Number three, network with fellow believers, that others that you know, may come to know Christ. Number four and this is so very important...

Know the gospel. These men knew enough to know that the answer was Jesus and it's so important for you and for me, if we are going to be a life link, to know the gospel of Jesus Christ. Now I am absolutely convinced that it is possible to know the gospel and not share it. But I know that it is true that you can never share a gospel that you do not know. You can know the gospel and not share it but you will never share a gospel if you do not know it and so this morning though our time is short I am going to take just a few quick moments and share with you how you can be a life link and share Christ with someone that you know. If you've got your pen out, I want you to take it and I want you to mark these passages of Scripture and we're gonna go to the book of Romans, frequently known as *The Roman Road*, the map of life and I want us to begin in Romans chapter 3 and I want you just to jot down these very simple, yet very vital concepts of how you could be a life link for someone to know Christ.

Number one if someone that you know needs to know Christ and you're gonna share the gospel with them you have to help them to understand their **condition**, our condition, we all have a common condition of need. Now obviously this man's condition was apparent. He could not walk, he had been crippled throughout his life, but the Bible tells us that we all share a common spiritual condition and it's found in Romans chapter 3 in verse 23. What does it say?

for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. You see ladies and gentlemen we so often think of sin in terms of an action, something I do or something that I don't do but the Bible speaks of sin as a condition, a condition that has impaired, a condition that has injured, a condition that has limited every one of our lives and many of us simply struggle to come face to face with our condition. It's sort of like a lady that I heard about, she was struggling to face the reality of her age. She looked at her friend and she said, "I don't think I look 40 years old do you?" And her friend said, "No, but you used to!" Huh, [pause for slight congregation laughter] You see we don't always like the reality of our condition. This is the bad news of the gospel but the reality is, is that we all have a condition called sin and that sin has caused us to fall short of the glory of God and it doesn't matter how much better you may look than others in this condition, we're all in the same condition. Let's

suppose just for a moment today that someone had promised to award a gift of 1 million dollars to the man or to the woman who could jump and touch the ceiling in this auditorium this morning. Now that'd be a pretty interesting proposition wouldn't it? I have to immediately admit that a, my apparent chances of doing that would be more limited than others. There are some men in this room who are at least a foot or more taller than I am. But the reality is it doesn't matter how much taller you may be than I am. When we start having a jumping contest the reality is if touching the ceiling is the goal we're all gonna be losers because see none of us can get there. It doesn't matter if a man's 7 feet and can jump 2 feet or 3 feet higher than I can, the reality is that may be, look better among us but it doesn't matter when the standard is at the ceiling and God realized our condition and God decided that He would step out of Heaven and step down to earth. But you see we have to deal with the condition and the condition is that we have all sinned and fallen short.

There's secondly a thing called our condemnation. Our condition is a serious one, it's not just a little something that's a problem, it's not just a mistake or a mishap. For the Bible goes on to say a few pages later in Romans chapter 6 and verse 23:

For the wages of sin is death,...

The Bible says there's a serious consequence to sin and it is death. Death meaning eternal separation from God and that the greatest need that we have is that we need life. We need someone who can restore our brokenness, our fallenness and our hopelessness. And so the reality is that we are under the condemnation to sin. Maybe you've wondered at times what do I have to do to go to Heaven, or what do I have to do to go to Hell? And the reality is to go to Hell you have to do absolutely nothing. For the Bible says he who has not believed on the name of the Son of God is condemned already. You see we are under the condemnation of sin.

But here is the third thing that we have to understand. Not only our condition and not only our condemnation but the wonderful message of the Bible is the message of God's compassion. God's compassion! Romans chapter 5 and verse 8, mark it if you don't have it marked in your Bible. This is what it says:

*But God demonstrates His own love toward us,
in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

Here's the message, I can't get to Him so He stepped out of Heaven and came to me. He came and took the condemnation of my sin, which, is death. Dying on the cross in order that through His death I might receive the greatest gift of all the expression of God's love, the gift of eternal life made possible through the death of Christ. Let's go back to the verse we were just looking at one more time, Romans 6:23;

*For the wages of sin is death,
but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

And all you have to do is to see that God in compassion has provided that gift for you and the Bible states it even fuller in Romans 8 and verse 1:

¹*There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.* ²*For the law of the...life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death.*

Was this man a slave? Yes he was a slave! He couldn't walk. He was a slave to his [dea] to his bed but he was set free and he began to live a new life and to walk a new walk. Why do you think it is that when a person is baptized they're showing the death, the burial and the resurrection of Christ and when we come up out of the water we say, "Raised to walk in newness of life?" Because they begin to walk with new power, with new purpose, with new strength because they have a new life in Jesus Christ. There is our condition. There is our condemnation. There is God's compassion. But how, how does this happen in my life, how does this happen in anyone's life? Very simple, it is God's command and what does God command, what does God demand of you and of me? Here it is Romans 10 verses 9 and 10:

⁹*that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus Christ and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.* ¹⁰*For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.*

And then look in verse 13:

For "whosoever calls on the name of the LORD will be saved."

That's the promise of God. What does He command? He commands that I admit my sin. He commands that I confess that it is Christ and Christ alone who can save. But when I make that confession believing in my heart that Christ is the answer the Bible says I will be saved. And just as that day in a moment, a miracle, that man rose, stood up, took his bed and walked away your life can be changed like that. Now what was the big controversy here? Jesus didn't look at the man and say get up and walk. The first thing Jesus did was He looked at him and He said, "**Son, you sins are forgiven.**" You see the real problem with this paralytic was the problem we all have, it was the sin problem and he had to deal with the sin issue and then ultimately he received the power of a new life, a life that was changed by Jesus Christ and that's exactly what the gospel does to any man, woman, boy or girl whoever sees, knows and confesses Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. You see if you want to be a life link you have to know the gospel. And then finally you have to...

Share Christ with your friends. God wants to use your life to matter for eternity. We give our lives to so many things that just don't matter but when you share Christ you become a life link for eternity. You begin to experience what it is to live and to say I was there the day

he, the day she met Jesus and they walked away and their life has never been the same because the greatest thrill in the world is being a life link whereby people you know begin to live and to know and to experience the power of Christ in their life. How can I be a life link? Love others authentically, intercede for others to know Christ, network with believers so that together we can make a difference, know the gospel, share the gospel with your friends.

Two questions and I'm finished. Number 1 who do you most identify with in this story? Who do you identify with? You know there really were 4 groups there, 4 groups that were represented in that room that day.

The first group that was represented were the crowd, Ha, they were just there. They were just there to see what would happen and sadly far too many of our churches are filled with crowds who are just spectating.

Secondly, not only were there the crowd of people there, there were the critical, that's right there were some very critical people there, the Scribes they were looking for something wrong and I have to tell you that every church has a critical section, a critics corner who are not understanding what God is doing or the work of Christ they just are there to criticize.

But not only were there the crowd and the critical there was the crippled. There was a man who was in that place who knew that he needed to meet Jesus and it may be today that the person you identify the most with is that you would say, "You know what? I need a life transforming power to work in me. I need to experience the work of Christ." And I ask you today could this day be that day, that moment? Maybe you feel obvious, maybe you feel embarrassed, what do you think this man must have felt being suspended in the middle of the room? But you see he was crippled and he wanted to walk and Jesus changed him and He can change you.

And then there were the concerned. The concerned, those 4 men who had given their all to given their all to do whatever it took to get their friend to Jesus. And today my prayer is that God would do something in the heart and the life of the people know as Prestonwood that every one of us would see ourselves as being a part of a life link as a concerned person who would ultimately be a part of seeing friends in the days to come know Christ.

In fact that brings me to the second question. Not only who do you identify with but Christian whose face is on that pallet for you? Is it a father or a mother, a sister or brother, a work associate, a school classmate, a neighbor, who is it? Cause I believe that every one of us need to see ourselves in light of this story and say, "Oh God would you somehow work through me to let me be a part of carrying that friend to Jesus.

I want to ask that heads be bowed and eyes closed. No one stirring, looking, this is a very important moment in our service today because I

believe that for some this is a life link. I believe that God has brought you here by appointment and that God has made the connection with your heart through His word today and as you've heard the word of God, that it is spoken to you, not because of my life or my persuasion but because of the work of the Holy Spirit and the power of the word of God. [Soft music starts] So right now in these moments I'm simply going to pray and in fact I'm going to lead in a prayer and today if you have never prayed and received Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, if today you want to have a new life and you want to be able to have your life changed I want to ask you to believe and to receive Christ in your heart. No one looking would you just say, "Dear Lord Jesus I believe that You are the Son of God and the Savior of the world. Jesus I acknowledge my condition today, that I'm a sinner, that I can't live up to Your standard but Jesus I thank You for coming from Heaven and dying on the cross for my sin. Today Lord Jesus I open the door of my heart, I receive you as my Savior and Lord. Lord I want to walk out of this building changed today by Your power at work in me. If you're in this building this morning while heads are bowed and eyes are closed and you prayed that prayer, you may be a boy or girl, you may be a middle aged adult, you may be a single adult, a married adult, a senior adult but you prayed that prayer I wonder if you would just as a word of testimony lift your hand and say, "Pastor I prayed that prayer today." Would you just lift it up and then put it down? Thank you! Yes and yes and you, is there another? And you and you. Would you just put it up and down? In the balcony up and then down, up and then down. I'm so grateful to God for His work in your heart today. I'm so thankful for the connection that's occurred in your life this morning and this is a great day and a great moment of celebration and I'm gonna pray and thank God for that. But I'm gonna ask you to do something else. I'm gonna ask you not only to have done this in the privacy of this moment but I'm gonna ask you to do what Jesus ask that man to do and that is in just a moment after we pray when we stand to sing and give this invitation, I'm going to ask that you rise and that you walk, that you simply stand to your feet and that you walk here and here standing at the front our pastors will be waiting to receive those today who have received Christ, to encourage you to celebrate this commitment to Christ. If you're in the balcony there'll be a pastor standing at each of the banners there and we want to help you and encourage you. There are others of you today who have received Christ but you need to make a life link with Prestonwood. It's not enough just to sit and be a part of the crowd you need to make a commitment, a commitment to do all that we can together to impact our community and our nation and our world for Christ and today our hands are extended to you and I want to encourage you to rise and walk and lead the way so that many others would come and make decisions for Christ today. For others of you, you need to follow Christ in baptism and as I mentioned before we'll schedule you for that. We want to help you, we want to lead you. The important thing is that you come right now.

Father I thank You for this moment. I thank You for the work of the Holy Spirit. Father I am believing You that You through the power of the Spirit and the message of the gospel will draw men, women, boys and girls to Yourself and into this fellowship that Christ may be magnified in this

place today. For it is in Jesus' name that we pray. Amen

I want you to look up and as you look up I want you to stand and for those of you who God has touched your heart I want you to rise and walk and come and today let us share and celebrate the work of Christ here at the front, there in the balcony, come right now as we sing.