TITLE: Segregation

TEXT: Mt. 9:9-13; Lk. 19:1-10; Mk. 16:15; Heb. 4:15;

Ro. 5:8

INTRODUCTION: This morning I want to talk about segregation. Segregation is a term that we don’t hear used a lot today but there was a time not all that long ago in our nation when the word was used a lot. Back when I was growing up in the late 1950’s and early 1960’s segregation was the issue of the day. Much like terrorism is today.

The word segregation was a prominent word used during the civil rights movement back in the days of

Rosa Parks and The Little Rock Nine and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Rosa Parks was the young black girl who sparked

the Montgomery, Ala., bus boycott in 1955 by refusing to give up her seat to a white person.

The Little Rock Nine were 9 young black men that first integrated the all white Central High School in Little Rock Arkansas in 1957.

Believed to be the greatest of the civil rights leaders, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was gunned down at the Lorraine Motel, in Memphis, in 1968 by a white segregationist.

The dictionary defines the word segregation as:

“The separation or isolation of a race, class, or ethnic group by enforced or voluntary residence in a restricted area, by barriers to social intercourse, by separate educational facilities, or by other discriminatory means.

Even though we don’t use the word a lot today we still see and even practice segregation in our time…

Maybe even in some ways that would surprise us!

We live in a time when Christians receive a lot of media attention. Unfortunately, it’s not always favorable. In fact, favorable portrayals of Christians in film and on television are almost non-existent today, and that is too bad because it can keep people from considering the gospel of Jesus Christ.

 Bad impressions don’t matter so much for our sakes,

As Christians, but we should care how they reflect on Christ and the gospel.

 In “Fearless Faith, living beyond the walls of Safe Christianity, John Fisher reexamines a believers role in the world and concludes that some sort of public relations campaign will never change bad impressions; only personal relationships can change them. And he says that can be a problem because so few Christians cultivate ongoing relationships with non-Christian friends. In other words we practice our own kind of segregation!

Studies reveal that two years after conversion, most Christians have lost all normal contact with friends outside of the Church.

 Many Christians today could not name even one non-saved person they conceder as a friend whom they do anything with on a regular basis.

 Many Christians feel that living a holy life requires that kind of separation or segregation.

Some will say, isn’t that what Jesus meant when He said that even though we live in this world we are not to be of this world?

Is this the kind of segregation or separation that Christ intended for his Church? To separate ourselves from the unsaved and lost around us?

**Matthew 9:9 - 13 (NIV)** **9As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector’s booth. “Follow me,” he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him. 10While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew’s house, many tax collectors and “sinners” came and ate with him and his disciples.**

**11When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and ‘sinners’?”**

**12On hearing this, Jesus said, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.** **13But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’****£** **For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”**

Before Matthew was called by Jesus he was a tax collector! The words tax collector and sinner were synonymous in that culture!

 Tax collectors were known for dishonest gain! They would often skim off of the top some of the money they collected from the people.

The common person perceived them as helpers of Rome and as such traitors and thieves!

Matthew was one such man!

Jesus hand picked him to be one of His disciples!

After choosing Matthew it says that Jesus actually goes to his house for dinner where other tax collectors and sinners had gathered!

This bothers the Pharisees so they ask some of Jesus disciples: Why is it that your master eats with tax collectors and sinners?

Jesus over-hears the question and then says to them:

**It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.  13But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’****£** **For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”**

No one has ever lived a holier life then Jesus yet Jesus was called a friend of sinners because of the company that he often kept!

It is easy to be around those who believe what we believe as a Christian; It is a different thing being around those who may challenge our faith and whose lifestyle and language may offend us.

 So often our response is segregation! We separate ourselves from “sinners” and just hang out the “Godly” crowd!

Years ago a Devout Christian by the name of Howard Hendricks said: “I can’t think of a better place for a non-Christian to sit down and light up a cigarette than in the home of a Christian where he can hear about and experience the love of God.”

 In his book John Fisher told the experiences of a pastor who served as a short term missionary in France. Part of his job was to knock on four thousand doors and leave a card that the home owner could fill out and mail in for a free Bible and study guide.

 Out of four thousand homes there was not a single response! Reflecting on his experience, the pastor said that if he had the opportunity to do it all over again, “I would move into that neighborhood and love my neighbors”!

Isn’t that in essence what Jesus did? Moved into the neighborhood of sinners and showed them the love of God!

 How often as Christians have we asked God to lead someone who is lost and needs Jesus across our path so that we can share the Gospel and love of God with them and at the same time do everything that we can to separate ourselves from those who may be living a life of sin!

One place that you will probably never find a devout Christian is in a bar or a casino!

When you think about it why not! I mean if that is where the sinners are why is it that we don’t go into those kind of places if it is sinners that we are seeking to save?

If you have had a problem in your past life with alcohol or gambling and are staying away for self preservation then ok!

But if our only reason is just because of what others may think of us then I believe we may be on shaky theologically ground!

Why do I say that? Because of the example of Jesus when He walked this earth!

You see I can picture Jesus going into a bar or a Casino!

If that is where he would need to go to find those in need of salvation then that is where he would go!

**Luke 19:1 - 10 (NIV)** **1Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through.** **2A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy.** **3He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man he could not, because of the crowd.** **4So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.** **5When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.”** **6So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.** **7All the people saw this and began to mutter, “He has gone to be the guest of a ‘sinner.’”** **8But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, “Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.”** **9Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham.  10For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.”**

Does this say that the Son of man just came to save the lost? NO!

 **It says that the son of man came to seek and to save what was lost.”**

Jesus came to seek the lost so that they could be saved!

***Seek= dzay-teh'-o***

**to *seek* (literally or figuratively); (go) about, desire, endeavour,** **enquire (for), seek (after or for.**

The lost were not all expected to seek Jesus, but Jesus sought the lost!

 In order to seek them He often would place himself wherever it was that they were!

And it doesn’t seem to me that Jesus stopped to think about what others would think for his doing so!

Just look at what happens when Jesus actually goes into the home of a known sinner for fellowship?

**8But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, “Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.”**

What is it that just happened here?

This sinner was convicted mightily of his sin and he repented!

**Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.”**

And he was saved! He passed from death to life!

**9Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham.**

What do you suppose would have happened to Zacchaeus if Jesus would have segregated himself from sinners and just hung out with the Church crowd?

Most probably Zacchaeus would have never come to find salvation and would have ended up in hell for all eternity!

EXAMPLE: I used to ride a lot with the police department as a police chaplain. For 2-3 years I logged about 400-500 hours per year riding in a patrol car with city and county police, usually at night. I would go up about 8 or 9 o’clock and sometimes ride until 1 or 2 in the morning.

There were times that I would be riding with the police and they would stop and do a bar check so I would go into the bar with the officer. Usually the officer would just go in and make his presence known and then leave.

Sometimes I noticed that some of the patrons seemed kind of uneasy when we were in there and I don’t know if it was because of the officer or because of the minister that was tagging along with him…

But I did notice that the lady that ran the bar at the time would start to talk to me when she saw me on the street.

One of the officers that I used to ride with quite a bit and this lady ended up getting engaged and asked me to do the wedding and it gave me the opportunity to talk to both of them about the Lord and witness Christ to them.

 Had I never gone on the bar check with the officer, had I always elected to just sit in the car when he went in, I doubt that I would have had that opportunity.

 Now I am not saying that everyone should leave here this morning and go to the nearest bar to witness. Unless the Lord directs you to do that!

But the point is how many times do we miss an opportunity to witness for Christ or share His love with our neighbors because of our fear of what others may think if they would happen to see us hanging out with the unsaved or in places where the unsaved are?

What if Jesus would have been concerned with what the Pharisees thought of him when they saw him going into the home of a despised tax collector such as Matthew or a Zacchaeus and it had kept him from going?

What would have been the final fate of these sinners if Jesus had the segregationist attitude that many of us have within the Church today!

 The great commission that Jesus has left with each of us as a Christian is:

**Mark 16:15 (NIV)** **15He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.**

Go into all the world!

I want to look at three words used here**:**

**1. Go=**

***por-yoo'-om-ahee***

**to *traverse*, that is, *travel* (literally or figuratively (make a, take a) journey, walk.**

**2. All=**

***hap'-as***

 ***A combination of Hap and AS***

**Hap= (as a particle of union) and****As****; absolutely *all* or (singular) *every* one:—all (things), every (one), whole.**

**3. World=**

 ***kos'-mos***

**orderly *arrangement*, by implication the *world* (in a wide or narrow sense, including its inhabitants, literally or figuratively**

We have been called to take a journey into every part of our world and to all of its inhabitants with the express intend of sharing the good news of the gospel of Christ with them!

John Fisher, the short term missionary to France, said that if he had the opportunity to do it all over again he would go back into the neighborhood where he had previously received 4000 rejections of Christ and move into that neighborhood and simply love his neighbors!

The fact is we are already living in those neighborhoods! We don’t need to go to France or China or any other far away place to find them!

All that we really need to do to fulfill the great commission that Christ has left us with is to open our doors and get to know the neighbors that we have right now!

Gods plan for our reaching the lost of this world is really pretty simple!

It involves followers of Christ making friends of those who don’t yet know him!

It will necessitate us as Christians to break out of our self-segregating patterns and start to engage the culture in which we live by engaging its people---one at a time!

We, the Church, need to take a lesson from the civil rights movement of the 50”s and 60’s and start to practice desegregation!

Possibly the best testimonial that we, the Church, could ever receive would be that we would, like Jesus, be accused of being a friend to sinners!

 When Scripture admonishes us to be in the world but not of the world, it is not talking about segregation from sinners but segregation from sin!

And that is the example that Christ left us!

**Hebrews 4:15 (NIV) 15For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin.**

Christ sinlessness was not accomplished through separating himself from sinners-- for that would have defeated His purpose for being here!

 His sinlessness was accomplished through living his life segregated from sin not sinners!

 When it came to people Jesus is the greatest leader of civil rights that this world has ever seen!

 And He accomplished it through desegregation!

**Romans 5:8 (NIV) 8But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**

This morning, do you conceder yourself to be a friend of sinners?

It is only as we do that we will ever be able to reach out to them with the love of Christ!

PRAYER

Lord, We pray that we would never have a segregationist attitude when it comes to the lost of our world but Lord that you would help us to become more and more like You. That we also could be called a friend of sinners.

 Help us to never be more concerned with what others may think of us then we are concerned with reaching out to the lost of our world with the message of the Gospel and by being examples of your love to them.

 Help us to be better stewards of your grace of salvation with our friends and neighbors and be better ambassadors of your love to others…

 Help us to live our lives, not segregated from the lost of our world but segregated from sin itself.