



Breaking Barriers: The Woman at the Well

INTRODUCTION

We live in a world with so many barriers... for example...when you are little... you can't wait to be 18... so that you can do stuff! But when you get to 18... you discover so many other barriers in your way!

Sadly... in the world today... there are also many barriers that divide... barriers that divide different races... different genders... different traditions... different status's... different income brackets... different cultures... different languages... different, different, different!

The question is... did God design us to live this way?... With all these camps... of us... and them? I think Paul gives us the answer in the book of **Galatians** when he says...

- **“There is neither Jew... nor Gentile... neither slave... nor free... nor is there male and female... for you are all one... in Christ Jesus.
(Galatians 3:28)**

And so this is a great reminder to us... not to allow barriers to divide us!

In our text for today... Jesus gave us a great example of some barrier breaking... in John chapter 4... when he engaged with a Samaritan lady... or the “Women at the Well”... as she has become known. Let me go through the story and then we will talk about it... **John 4:1;**

- **“Now Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that he was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John—² although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples.³ So he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee.⁴ Now he had to go through Samaria.**

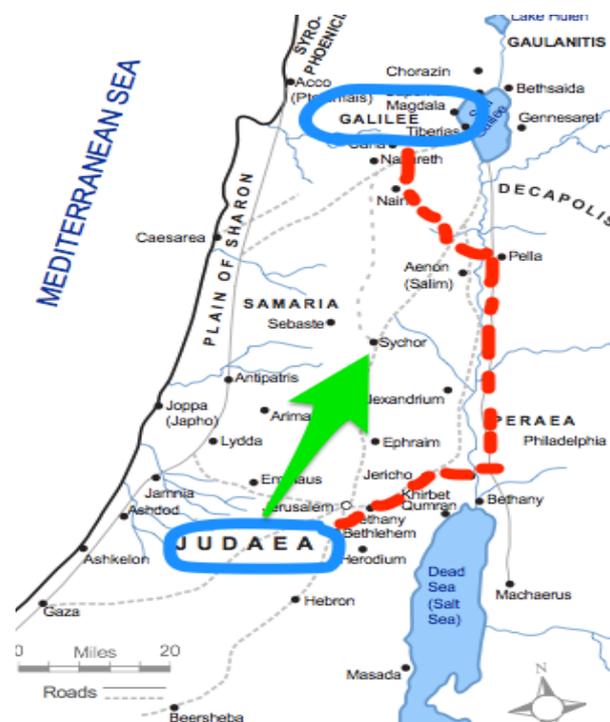
Now last line to us... is not a big statement – “He has to go through Samaria.” It was the shortest route between Judea and Samaria... but there is some history behind this.

The Samaritans and the Jews were not on good terms. The Samaritans were descendants of the Northern Kingdom of Israel... who had settled and married in Samaria – they were considered by Jews... to be not Jewish enough... and there was a hatred between them.

The Samaritans continued to worship as the Jews did... but took only the first five books of the Old Testament... as their spiritual authority. They built a ‘rival’ temple on Mount Gerizim – which they believed to be the site of the altar where Abraham prepared to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice – but this was destroyed by the Hasmonean king.

At the time of Jesus’s encounter with the Samaritan woman... Mount Gerizim was still a holy place... and even today... the Samaritan community offers lambs as a ritual sacrifice... on the slopes of Mount Gerizim at Passover time.

So what is the point of this? Well... Most ‘good Jews’ would not have travelled through Samaria by choice – it was enemy land... and they would go out of their way to go around it... even though it added days to the journey. Here is a map to show you what I mean...



Down at the bottom you will see Judea... and up at the top... Galilee. If there had been GPS’s in those days... every GPS... would tell them to go straight through

Samaria... it was the shortest route... But all the Jew's ignored that... and took a much longer route by going around. But not Jesus! Jesus said he had to go this way – There was someone he wanted to meet – and some barriers he wanted to break down! Let's read on, **verse 5**;

- **⁵ So he came to a town in Samaria... called Sychar... near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶ Jacob's well was there, and Jesus... tired as he was from the journey... sat down by the well... It was about noon...**
- **⁷ When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" ⁸ (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) ⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him,**
- **"You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)**

Here goes another barrier – society of the day.. said that Jesus should not talk to her – the Jews and the Samaritans were not friends. What was also unspoken here... is that this lady, drawing water at the hottest time of the day, has a past. It was likely that she was at the well at this time of day... to avoid the gossips and the looks from the other ladies who came in the morning and evening when it was cooler. **Verse 10**;

- **¹⁰ Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God... and who it is that asks you for a drink... you would have asked him... and he would have given you living water..." ¹¹ "Sir," the woman said... "you have nothing to draw with... and the well is deep...**
- **Where can you get this living water? ¹² Are you greater than our father Jacob... who gave us the well... and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?" ¹³ Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again,**
- **¹⁴ but whoever drinks the water I give them... will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them... will become in them... a spring of water... welling up to eternal life." ¹⁵ The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water... so that I won't get thirsty... and have to keep coming here to draw water."**

As you can see... she didn't quite get what Jesus was saying – He was offering more than just a temporary ease of thirst... but an offer of salvation. **Verse 16**;

- **¹⁶ He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back." ¹⁷ "I have no husband," she replied. Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. ¹⁸ The fact is... you have had five husbands, and**

the man you now have... is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true.”

- **¹⁹ “Sir,” the woman said, “I can see that you are a prophet. ²⁰ Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.” ²¹ “Woman,” Jesus replied, “believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.**
- **²² You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ Yet a time is coming... and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks.**
- **²⁴ God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.” ²⁵ The woman said, “I know that Messiah” (called Christ) “is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.” ²⁶ Then Jesus declared, “I, the one speaking to you—I am he.”**

Jesus shattered two of this lady’s barriers – her past – the fact that she had 5 husbands... and now was with another man... who was not her husband (implying he was someone else’s husband) and also the barrier of her faith traditions. God’s salvation is not for the ‘well behaved’ and ‘good’ people – it is for all. **Verse 27;**

- **²⁷ Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no one asked, “What do you want?” or “Why are you talking with her?” ²⁸ Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people,**
- **²⁹ “Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?”**

And then just a bit further on in verse 39;

- **³⁹ Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him... because of the woman’s testimony... “He told me everything I ever did.” ⁴⁰ So when the Samaritans came to him... they urged him to stay with them... and he stayed two days.**
- **⁴¹ And because of his words... many more became believers. ⁴² They said to the woman... “We no longer believe... just because of what you said... now we have heard for ourselves... and we know that this man... really is the Savior of the world.”**

When Jesus is still talking to the lady... along comes the disciples – no one said what they were thinking... but they were all thinking it! **“What do you want?” or “Why are you talking with her?”**

You see friends... Jesus broke down barriers... and the disciples were confused and judgemental. Yet this lady's encounter with Jesus was life changing – not just for her... but also for the town she lived in. She went back to the town and shared the good news... and through her... many came to believe in Jesus.

There are so many boundaries in this story that it is hard to do them justice – Jesus was just going counter-culture, counter society – disregarding traditions and the status quo. Let me sum up a few of the barriers He broke that day – many of them we will come back to in greater detail throughout the series.

To help us in this series, we decided to build a wall up front here. There are going to be a few boxes each Sunday... we will keep adding each week... to help you see the barriers that we so often come up against and need to breakthrough. But here is the first today...

1. JESUS BROKE GEOGRAPHICAL BARRIERS

(Place “geographical” box)

While tradition said... that it was a bad idea to go through Samaria... Jesus went anyway – He had a divine appointment... at a well to keep. For many of us... borders are big barriers - they represent an unknown place... new cultures, a different way of doing things. For some... Ou Kaapse Weg is a barrier... and no one even wants to go over the mountain! But there are also borders between countries... and many of us here in Cape Town... may never leave living in South Africa... but for others.... I believe that God has a divine appointment arranged also... **Acts 1:8** says;

- **But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”**

God has instructed us... with the help of the Holy Spirit... to take His message to the ends of the earth – don't let geography be a barrier to God's call on your life. But secondly...

2. JESUS BROKE RACIAL BARRIERS

(Place “race” box)

According to the Jews... Samaritans were a mixed group of people... as a result of the intermarriage of Jews and Samaritans... Interesting the geneticists also find the Samaritans interesting, listen to this;

In actuality, the Samaritans are a unique people... whose history can be traced to Biblical times. They are not considered ethnically Jewish or Arab... despite the fact that Samaritans have lived in close proximity to both groups for thousands of years. Though they used to be numerous, there are now only about 700 Samaritans left, divided between two towns near Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. They rarely marry non-Samaritans, and their religious practices are distinct from all Jewish sects. Their ability to remain both (seemingly) genetically and culturally isolated in one of the

most diverse regions on Earth... has piqued the interest of both geneticists and historians, who have spent years trying to understand this unique group of people tucked away in the Levantine desert.

So they are an interesting people group... And they must have been sufficiently different in appearance... that this lady straight away knew that Jesus was not a Samaritan – whether it was features, dress or accent we do not know.

Now... We live in a country where we know... and still experience the pain that is brought by racial barriers. For Jesus... those barriers do not exist... and as His followers... we should also be breaking those barriers. Sure... We can acknowledge... and enjoy the diversity we have across races and cultures... but the minute we start using that diversity for division... we are setting up barriers that are not of God... **Genesis 1:27;**

- **“So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.”**

Just like the graffiti artist painted on that bridge over the M3 – “There is only one race... the human race.”

3. JESUS BROKE SOCIAL BARRIERS

(Place “social” box)

Society in general... had a list of reasons why this lady and Jesus should be talking. She was woman (gender barrier), they were different ethnicity (racial barrier) they were different religions (religious barrier) they had different traditions (tradition barrier). So many reasons... and so many opinions. Even the disciples thought so, but at least they were not foolish enough to voice that out loud to Jesus. Paul said this in **Ephesians 2:13-18;**

- **But now in Christ Jesus... you who once were far away... have been brought near... by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one... and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility,**
- **¹⁵ by setting aside in his flesh... the law with its commands and regulations... His purpose was to create in himself... one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶ and in one body... to reconcile both of them to God.... through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.**
- **¹⁷ He came and preached peace to you.... who were far away... and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸ For through him... we both have access to the Father... by one Spirit.**

Jesus is about destroying walls – especially between us and God - there is nothing, no tradition, no culture, no social norm that should keep us from His love or from sharing His love with others. But here's the last barrier I want to point out;

4. JESUS BREAKS BARRIERS OF THE PAST

(Place “past” box)

When churches and missions organizations look for new missionaries today... there are some hectic qualifications. And for good reason.

But you know what... If you were to choose the first missionary to the Samaritans... I doubt you would have chosen this lady at the well – I mean... her past was big... and her reputation seemed to be well known. Jesus did not hide the fact that He knew it – but it did not stop Him from sharing the good news with her, and she became a passionate missionary of the gospel.

Our past often becomes a barrier for us moving forward, sharing our faith with others. We think... if they knew how we messed up... they would not respond to the message. But it is God's love they respond to, not our clean shiny lives. The reality is:

Romans 5.8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Friends, I want to remind you today... There is nothing in your past... or anyone's past... that can undo God's love for you. Don't let your past or anyone else's past become a barrier.

CONCLUSION

So friends... What barriers have you built in your life between you and God? What barriers are in your life that are preventing you from fulfilling relationships? What barriers are there that prevent you from sharing God's love? Are you a barrier building or a barrier breaker?