

*Jesus Dispels the Facade of “Us” and “Them”*  
John 4:1-42

There are plenty of people – both recent and in years past – both around the world and in our very nation – who have modeled for us how to build **barriers** and burn bridges to those who we perceive as different from us. I hope that very few of us have held such feelings towards those who are not like you, but odds are that we’ve harbored biases towards others. The fact is, we don’t like to face the sometimes-ugly truth about ourselves.

The problems of prejudice are not new ones. These were major problems in Jesus’ day. But what made Jesus so attractive to so many people was the way he shattered the commonly held stereotypes of “us” and “them.” [P] What stereotypes & prejudices were problems in Jesus day? Well, let me tell you about the Samaritans. The Jews had a long-seated hatred for the Samaritans. Why? It started over 700 years earlier when the nation of Israel was taken into captivity to Babylon. Now, not all the people were taken away to Babylon; a few were left behind. And after the Babylonians moved many of the Israelites out, they then moved other conquered people groups in. Then, during the 70 years that the captivity lasted, the Israelites that were left behind intermarried with these new people groups. The result was a mixed blood race that was part Jew, part Gentile.

To make matters worse this race of half-breeds also practiced a blended form of the Jewish religion. They only accepted the Pentateuch (the first five books of the OT). And then they blended in elements of the pagan religions from these other people groups. This form of Judaism was highly offensive to true Jews. And so, when the Jews returned from exile, they drove these half-breeds out of Jerusalem and Judea. They moved north into Samaria and there you have the Samaritans.

The Jews had such animosity for the Samaritans that they refused to even walk through Samaria. In the southern part of Israel, you have Judea, where Jerusalem is. Then north of Judea is Samaria. And north of Samaria is Galilee, where Jesus was raised in a town

called Nazareth. The Jordan River runs north and south along the eastern borders of these territories. This posed a problem then if you wished to travel from Judea to Galilee or vice versa because Samaria was in between them. So devout Jews would go out of their way and cross the Jordan River and then travel north where they would then cross the Jordan River again to enter Galilee.

This is just one more indicator of the deep-seated prejudices of that day. But then Jesus comes along. [P] As we look at today's scripture, I want to share 3 steps we need to take in order to break barriers & build bridges to those who are different from you or me.

**1. You Must Go Outside Your Comfort Zone.** The first 3 verses set the backdrop:

*1The Pharisees heard that Jesus was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John, 2although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples. 3When the Lord learned of this, he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee.*

Now, look at the next verse (4): *He had to go through Samaria.* Why does it say that he had to go? Surely he could have crossed the Jordan and avoided Samaritan territory like all the other devout Jews did. It wasn't that Jesus couldn't cross the river. The necessity lay not in geography, but in Jesus' mission. He "had to go through Samaria" because those were his marching orders from the Father.

At least nine times in the book of John, Jesus emphasizes that he only did what the Father told him to do ... *"The world must learn that I love the Father and that I do exactly what my Father has commanded me"* (Jn. 14:31). If he had to go through Samaria, it's because that's exactly what his Father wanted him to do. In fact one commentator goes so far as to say, *"As the Savior of all people, Jesus had to confront the smoldering suspicion and enmity between Jew and Samaritan by ministering to his enemies."* (M.C. Tenney) In other words, he was on a mission from his Father to shatter the stereotypes of us & them. In order to do that, he had to leave his comfort zone.

Let me tell you the story of another rabbi. Rabbi Michael Weissner lived in Lincoln, Nebraska. And for more than 3 years, Larry Trapp, a self-proclaimed Nazi & Ku Klux Klansman, directed a torrent of hate-filled mailings and phone calls toward him.

Declaring his apartment the KKK state headquarters, his whole purpose in life seemed to be to spew out slurs against Weisser and all those like him.

At first, the Weissers were so afraid they locked their doors & worried themselves sick over the safety of their family. But one day Rabbi Weisser found out that Trapp was a 42-year-old clinically blind, double amputee. And he became convinced that Trapp's own physical helplessness was a source of the bitterness he expressed. So Rabbi Weisser decided to do the unexpected. He left a message on Trapp's phone, telling him of another side of life...a life free of hatred and racism. Weisser said, "I probably called 10 times before he finally picked up the phone and asked me why I was harassing him. I said that I'd like to help him. I offered him a ride to the grocery store." Trapp was stunned. Disarmed by such kindness, he started thinking. He later admitted, in tears, that he heard in the rabbi's voice, "something I hadn't experienced in years ... love."

Slowly the bitter man began to soften. One night he called the Weissers and said he wanted out, but didn't know how. They grabbed a bucket of fried chicken and took him dinner. Before long they made a trade: in return for their love, he gave them his swastika rings, hate tracts, and Klan robes. Trapp finally confessed, "They showed me so much love that I couldn't help but love them back." [P]

It all started with someone willing to step outside of his comfort zone to offer grace to a man who had offered them nothing but hate. [P] Is there someone who has built a barrier b/n themselves & you? Or have you built a barrier b/n yourself & someone else? Are you willing to start today to break that barrier & build a bridge instead? Are you willing even if it means going outside your comfort zone? To whom could you begin to show the grace (unmerited favor) of Christ? How could you show His love to them in a practical, meaningful way? I can guarantee it won't be easy; but it will be worth it.

**2. You Must Go Beyond Your Social Circle.** As if it wasn't bad enough going through Samaria, we then learn that Jesus actually interacted with the Samaritans on his way through. I mean if he thought he had to cut through Samaria in order to get to Galilee quickly, at least he could have avoided the people. Look straight ahead and don't make eye contact and whatever you do don't speak to them. Not Jesus. Look at the next vs:

5So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar ...6Jacob's well was there, and Jesus ... sat down by the well ...7When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" 9The Samaritan woman said to him ... "How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.) The Jews & the Samaritans didn't hang out together. They didn't talk to each other. They didn't get along. They traveled in completely different social circles. So not only does Jesus go outside his comfort zone (Samaria); he goes beyond his social circle (the Samaritans).

If you think things are bad now, they're about to get even worse. He doesn't just interact with any Samaritan, but with a Samaritan woman. The Jewish rabbis of Jesus' day would not even teach women. Yet here is Jesus reaching out to a Samaritan woman.

And when it seemed that things couldn't get any worse, not only was this person a Samaritan and a woman; she was also an immoral woman. She had been married 5 times & she wasn't married to the man she was now living with. So here's the picture: Jesus is hanging out at a well all alone with an adulterous Samaritan woman. She's got 3 strikes against her – 3 reasons (perspective of the Jews) why Jesus shouldn't even acknowledge her existence. And yet he does. In fact, he was the one who initiates the conversation.

Not only should a good Jew not associate with this woman, but we also have good reason to believe that even the Samaritans themselves shunned her. Vs. 6 tells us "it was about the sixth hour" when Jesus met this woman. The sixth hour was noon. It would've been unusual for a woman to draw water in the heat of the day. Usually they went in the evening when it had cooled off. That she was there at noon indicates that she was probably trying to avoid the other women because they did not accept her because of her immorality. This woman was an outcast among outcasts! If there was anyone on the planet that Jesus should not have associated with, it was this woman. But he was willing to go beyond his social circle in order to break barriers & bring his Good News!

In his book, "*Through the Valley of the Kwai*," Earnest Gordon tells this story: We found ourselves on the same track with several carloads of Japanese wounded after we were freed from the Kwai prison camp. These unfortunates were on their own without medical care. No longer fit for action, they had been packed into railway cars returning

to Bangkok. They were in a shocking state. I have never seen men filthier. Uniforms were encrusted with mud, blood & excrement. Their wounds, sorely inflamed, crawling with maggots. They looked at us forlornly as they sat with their heads resting against the carriages, waiting for death. They had been discarded as expendable, the refuse of war. These were the enemy. They were more cowed and defeated than we had ever been.

Without a word most of the officers in my section unbuckled their packs, took out part of their rations and a rag or two, and, with water canteens in their hands, went over to the Japanese train. Our guards tried to prevent us, bawling, "No goodka! No goodka!" But we ignored them and knelt down by the enemy to give water and food, to clean and bind up their wounds. Grateful cries of "Arigato!" ("Thank you") followed us when we left. I regarded my comrades with wonder. Eighteen months ago they would have joined readily in the destruction of our captors had they fallen into our hands. Now these same officers were dressing the enemy's wounds. We had experienced a moment of grace, there in those bloodstained railway cars. God had broken through the barriers of our prejudice and had given us the will to obey His command, "Thou shalt love."

Just like the Samaritan woman at the well, these Japanese soldiers were outcasts among their own people. Certainly, American soldiers and Japanese soldiers didn't travel in the same social circles, but that didn't stop those American soldiers from showing their Japanese counterparts the unconditional love and unmerited favor of Jesus Christ.

If those soldiers could do what they did under those conditions, then what's our excuse? Who are those beyond your social circle that you need to reach out to? For far too many in the church, anyone who doesn't go to church is outside our social circle. It is long past time that we in the Church started breaking down the barriers that divide us and start building the Kingdom of God to a lost & dying world by offering them the love & grace & gospel of Christ!

And what do you think might happen when you start to reach out to those so-called "undesirables?" What do you think others might say? [P]

**3. You Might Have To Go It Alone.** Look at the disciples' reaction to Jesus' interaction with this woman: His disciples had gone to the village to buy food for lunch ... Just then his disciples came back. They were shocked. They couldn't believe he was talking with that kind of a woman. No one said what they were all thinking, but their faces showed it. (Jn. 4:8, 27, The Message)

The disciples were blown away by the fact that here was the man they believed to be the Messiah talking with an adulterous Samaritan woman all alone at a well. Did they join Jesus in his conversation with this woman? No way! They don't even speak to Jesus until after the woman went back into town. Even then, they don't bring up the subject. Instead, they ask him what he wanted for lunch. It seems they were just going to pretend that this incident had never happened.

Jesus' disciples possessed some prejudice themselves. Luke records another time Jesus was traveling through Samaria. He wanted to go to a particular town and sent some of his disciples on ahead to prepare for his arrival; but the Samaritans there refused to welcome him: "When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, 'Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?'" (Luke 9:54) They were ready to wipe out those good-for-nothing Samaritans without a second thought.

Jesus was going to have to go it alone, and it was going to cost him too. It wasn't long after this that the Jewish leaders confront him: "That clinches it! We were right all along when we called you a Samaritan and said you were crazy!" (Jn. 8:48, Message). Just as someone, who judges another based on the color of their skin, or the part of the world they are from, or the side of the tracks they call home, might brand someone who befriends such people with a *slur*-name, so Jesus was being labeled – "Samaritan-lover." Can you picture the crowd ganging up on him: "I told you he was just a crazy Samaritan-lover!" In this matter, Jesus would stand alone. [P]

If following Jesus example of breaking barriers & building bridges means that no one will go with you, are you prepared to go it alone? Do you remember the verse from "I Have Decided to Follow Jesus": "Though none go with me, still I will follow, no turning back, no turning back." We know the lyrics, but have we lived them? Jesus did.

Now, look at verse 39 – Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony. Jesus was able to reach the people of that town because he was willing to go ... *beyond his social circle*, even when it meant *going it alone*. He never could have reached that town otherwise. [P]

If you have harbored prejudices against other people, let me encourage you that people can change. [Pause] Jesus dispels the facade of “us” and “them.”

There were times during his ministry on earth where he had to go it alone. But what about today? Does he still have to go it alone? Or will you go with him?

Prayer: Jesus, thank you for breaking through every barrier to come to us, so that you could bring us back to the Father. Nothing could hold you back. You were not deterred. You dispelled the lies. You overcame the hatred. You brought to us redemption, reconciliation, and peace. We need it! We need you! We pray that you will build your Kingdom through us. Amen