We're doing something a bit different today.

Week-by-week, we usually work our way through whole books of the Bible, and at the moment, we're in the Gospel of John. And last week we finished up John 3. And it has been sooo good. No wonder it's one of the best known and most loved bits of the Bible…

And so now we're up to Chapter 4. And Chapter 4 is **also** really, really good. There is a significant section in Ch4, recording the interaction Jesus had with a Samaritan woman at the well. And it is so significant, I don't know if we're going to spend 2 or 3 weeks on that part.

And this is where my dilemma lies.

It is pretty important to hold all of Chapter 4 together, but Robyn and I go on holidays tomorrow (yeah!!! Shorter sermons for a couple of weeks), and then when we get back, it's Palm Sunday, and then Good Friday and Easter Sunday…

So, I really don't want to start on chapter 4 today, and then have a 5 week gap until we get to Part 2….

What are we to do???

I prayed about it, and it seemed a good plan to take a moment to better understand the culture in which Jesus lived.

- culture;
- land
- Nation of Israel;

- Regions within;
- It's neighbours; and

- the **divisions** within;
- the **prejudices** that were held; and

- the <u>history</u> that **led** to these differences and prejudices.

You see, there's a whole undercurrent, bubbling away, in the Gospel of John, that if we're not aware of the undercurrent, we're going to have trouble catching on to how that's played out in the Gospel,,, and we'll also miss the application for us, in how the Gospel plays out in different segments and undercurrents in **our** society….

So, we're going to take a moment, to get the lie of the land, and hopefully we'll understand (a whole lot better) why the Samaritans were hated, and why Jesus (as a Galilean) was very much on the outer with the religious leaders based in Jerusalem…

So, let's look at a map:
Oh, lookey here. Fooled you. You were expecting a map of the Holy Land…

Instead, we have a map of Australia. In fact, it's a map of Federal Electorates, colour-coded by the political party that holds each electorate… Do you notice anything? Do you notice the difference between the states? Do you notice the **big** difference between **most** Rural electorates and the cities????

You know, people sometimes say to me, *"I don't know how such-and-such-a political party ever gets into power. I don't know anyone who votes for them…"*

And my answer to them, is *"That's because you live in one of the most conservative electorates in the country, and most of your friends are Christians, (who also mostly vote conservative)."*… You see, we hang out with people who are like ourselves, and that's why you don't know anyone who votes different to you.

And so, we don't realise the massive difference there is between states, and especially the difference between city and country (not just politically – it's the difference in mindset/culture, that gets expressed politically)…

Do you think this is a new thing? No, it is not…

Back in Jesus' day, the people of Judea, and especially those who considered themselves "the elite", who were stationed in the religious capital of Jerusalem, ,, they pretty-much looked down their noses at them Galileans (up in the North), and they had a palpable hatred for the Samaritans… And there is a long history, behind this.

So, let's change the map:
Here's the map you were expecting in the first place. It's an imperfect map, but it gives you the idea.

Down in the South is Judea (with Jerusalem as its Capital).

Up in the North, is Galilee, which is Jesus' home district (you can see Nazareth there on the map).

And Galilee **is** part of Israel,,,, (sort of). It is separated somewhat.
It's separated:

- geographically, because Samaria is in between Judea and Galilee; and
- politically, because it's ruled by a different person.
  Herod Antipas ruled Galilee, while
  Archelaus ruled Judea, Samaria, and Idumea…
- Historically, and we'll get to that now.

Let's go back to King David. Here's a map of the Kingdom of David at the beginning of his reign, and the green bits is what he added to it, during his reign. You can see by the map on the right, that by the time of Jesus, Israel had lost everything on the Eastern side of the Jordan, and the Western side, had retracted back to an area similar to at the beginning of David's reign.

So, under King David, Israel was strong and united. And that continued under David's son (Solomon)…. But King Solomon, although he's known as the wise man in the Bible, he did something very foolish… He married a heap of foreign women, who worshipped other Gods…

Having more than one wife for a start, I think that's stupid, but worse than that, he started worshipping their gods…

1 Kings 11:3–13 (ESV)

3 He had 700 wives, who were princesses, and 300
concubines. And his wives turned away his heart.
4 For when Solomon was old his wives turned away his
heart after other gods, and his heart was not wholly
true to the LORD his God, as was the heart of David
his father. 5 For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the
goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the
abomination of the Ammonites. 6 So Solomon did
what was evil in the sight of the LORD and did not
wholly follow the LORD, as David his father had done.
7 Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the
abomination of Moab, and for Molech the abomination
of the Ammonites, on the mountain east of
Jerusalem. 8 And so he did for all his foreign wives,
who made offerings and sacrificed to their gods.

9 And the LORD was angry with Solomon, because his
heart had turned away from the LORD, the God of
Israel, who had appeared to him twice 10 and had
commanded him concerning this thing, that he should
not go after other gods. But he did not keep what
the LORD commanded. 11 Therefore the LORD said to
Solomon, "Since this has been your practice and you
have not kept my covenant and my statutes that I
have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom
from you and will give it to your servant. 12 Yet for
the sake of David your father I will not do it in your
days, but I will tear it out of the hand of your son.

13 However, I will not tear away all the kingdom, but I will give one tribe to your son, for the sake of David my servant and for the sake of Jerusalem that I have chosen."

And so, when King Solomon died, (I'm not going to go into all of the intricacies), but his son, Rehoboam, became a tyrant, who treated his people like slaves, and most of Israel said, "We don't need to put up with this. Why should we have to bow down to someone from the tribe of Judah? We're not from the tribe of Judah."

And so the ten tribes up in the North, separated themselves, and formed a kingdom which became known as "Israel", which left the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin in the South. And that kingdom became known as "Judah".

And so, here is a map of the divided kingdom.

What a tragedy… Because of the unfaithfulness of Solomon, the promised land – the kingdom of God's people, was ripped in two…

And this should be a constant reminder to you and I: The Lord demands our faithfulness. This is His command: "Worship no other God, but Me."

But sadly, many people today do worship another God. Oh, they may still call Him God/Jesus,,, But it's not the one true God who reveals Himself in His word. They worship a god of their own making. Modern-day idolatry is quite common.

You can recognise it when someone says "I like to think that God is like…" and then they describe the God they worship – a god, in the way that they think he should be – a god that unsurprisingly, looks very much like themselves…

But, if it hadn't been Solomon, it could have been any number of the kings that followed…

As you read through the kings of Israel and Judah, we constantly read things like "So & so did evil in the eyes of the Lord, and usually it was to do with idolatry…"

And it happened with the Kings of Israel, and it happened with the kings of Judah… In fact, all of the prophets were sent, (some to Israel), (some to Judah), with a message to turn away from idolatry/worshipping other gods – turn back to The Lord YHWH and be faithful to Him and Him alone…

For hundreds of years, the prophets preached the same message (in the North and in the South), but eventually, because neither kingdom would listen, God allowed regional Super-powers, to destroy them…

Israel in the North, was the first to fall (722BC). The Assyrians from the North came and defeated them, and took much of the population away in captivity, never to return…

And you'd think Judah would've seen what happened to Israel, and repented… But no, Judah still didn't learn their lesson… And 136 years later (586BC), Babylon conquered

Judah, and took many of the educated and leaders, away into exile… And so, people like Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, Mordecai, Esther, were living in a foreign land, because of this exile…

And these heroes of the faith are a great example for us: Godly people, living in a foreign land… And as Disciples of Jesus today, we are strangers/aliens in a foreign land… We belong to the Kingdom of God, but we live as good citizens in the land in which we live (until Jesus returns)…

Anyway, after 70 years of exile, the people of Judah begin returning to their land (and they come in a few different stages. The first group returned around about 520BC). And years later, in the time of Nehemiah, God did a miraculous thing.

The Persian King Artaxerxes noticed that his cup-bearer Nehemiah was sad, and he asked why. And reading from Nehemiah 2: (ESV)

3 I said to the king, "Let the king live forever! Why should not my face be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' graves, lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?" 4 Then the king said to me, "What are you requesting?" So I prayed to the God of heaven. 5 And I said to the king, "If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favour in your sight, that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' graves, that I may rebuild it." 6 And the king said to me (the queen sitting beside him), "How long

will you be gone, and when will you return?" So it pleased the king to send me when I had given him a time.

And so this pagan king sent Nehemiah back to Judah, with letters giving him authority to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, and supplied provisions to do the rebuilding…

And a long story made short, the walls get rebuilt, and more exiled people return home to Judah, and there's a great celebration. (around about 445BC)

So, that's the southern Kingdom of Judah, resettled by a people who are now determined to be loyal to God…

What about the 10 tribes in the North? What happened to Israel? Well, most of the people were taken away. And then Assyria brought people from other lands they had captured, to what is now known as "Samaria"…

And we can read about this in 2 Kings 17 (ESV)
24 And the king of Assyria brought people from Babylon, Cuthah, Avva, Hamath, and Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria **instead** of the people of Israel. And **they** took possession of Samaria and lived in its cities. 25 And at the beginning of their dwelling there, they did not fear the LORD.

Therefore the LORD sent lions among them, which
killed some of them. 26 So the king of Assyria was
told, "The nations that you have carried away and
placed in the cities of Samaria do not know the law of
the god of the land. Therefore he has sent lions
among them, and behold, they are killing them,
because they do not know the law of the god of the
land."

27 Then the king of Assyria commanded, "Send there
one of the priests whom you carried away from there,
and let him go and dwell there and teach them the
law of the god of the land." 28 So one of the priests
whom they had carried away from Samaria came and
lived in Bethel and taught them how they should fear
the LORD.

29 But every nation still made gods of its own and
put them in the shrines of the high places that the
Samaritans had made, every nation in the cities in
which they lived. 30 The men of Babylon made
Succoth-benoth, the men of Cuth made Nergal, the
men of Hamath made Ashima, 31 and the Avvites made
Nibhaz and Tartak; and the Sepharvites burned
their children in the fire to Adrammelech and
Anammelech, the gods of Sepharvaim.

32 They also feared the LORD and appointed from among themselves all sorts of people as priests of the high places, who sacrificed for them in the shrines of the high places. 33 So they feared the LORD but also served their own gods, after the manner of the nations from among whom they had been carried away.

34 To this day they do according to the former manner. They do **not** fear the LORD, and they do **not** follow the statutes or the rules or the law or the commandment that the LORD commanded the children of Jacob, whom he named Israel.

35 The LORD made a covenant with them and commanded them, "You shall not fear other gods or bow yourselves to them or serve them or sacrifice to them, 36 but you shall fear the LORD, who brought you out of the land of Egypt with great power and with an outstretched arm. You shall bow yourselves to him, and to him you shall sacrifice. 37 And the statutes and the rules and the law and the commandment that he wrote for you, you shall always be careful to do. You shall not fear other gods, 38 and you shall not forget the covenant that I have made with you. You shall not fear other gods, 39 but you shall fear the LORD your God, and he will deliver you out of the hand of all your enemies."

40 However, they would not listen, but they did according to their former manner.

41 So these nations feared the LORD and also served their carved images. Their children did likewise, and their children's children—as their fathers did, so they do to this day.

That, my friends, is a picture of Samaria. Most of the people of Israel were taken away. It was repopulated by people who served other gods. But because they were getting eaten by lions, they decided they had better worship the God of the land (YHWH, our God)…

And they thought that because they worshipped YHWH alongside all their other gods, then feared YHWH… No, they didn't… If they truly feared YHWH, they would have obeyed His commandments and worshipped no other god.

And so, Judah (which becomes Judea in the south) has been repopulated with the People of God, who are faithful to God, and Samaria has been repopulated by foreigners who **think** they're worshipping YHWH, but they're not following His commandments. They won't worship at Jerusalem – they build their own temple. And they have their own priesthood. And their religion totally disregards the commandments of God. They worship other Gods; and don't follow His commands…

That's why the Samaritans were hated…

And so, John 4 begins like this:

4 Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptising more disciples than John [2](although Jesus himself did not baptise, but only his disciples), [3] he left Judea and departed again for Galilee. [4] And he had to pass through Samaria. [5] So he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. [6] Jacob's well was there; so Jesus, wearied as he was from his journey, was sitting beside the well. It was about the sixth hour.

[7] A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." [8] (For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.) [9] The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.)

And that sets the scene, for what we will cover in about 5 weeks time: The Jews have no dealings with Samaritans. , but Jesus brings, to even the Samaritans, salvation… A people who have a long history of **thinking** they're worshipping God, but because they weren't whole-hearted, they weren't on the right side of God…

But Jesus came, as not only the Messiah of the Jews…
16 "For God so loved the **world**, that he gave his only Son, that whoever **is believing** in him should not perish but have eternal life.

Guess what – that includes the Samaritans. Jesus didn't only come for the Jews. He came for the Samaritans/you/me…

Alright, so that's:

- Judea – the Jews returned to the land to remain faithful to Him;
- Samaria – a mixed race, with some connection to God, but not faithful to Him;

What about Galilee??? Remember, Galilee is right up in the North. It's even further North of Samaria… And yet Galilee (in the time of Jesus) is also, populated by the Jews… How did that come to be?

Well, the history on this is actually a bit hazy. It **used** to be part of the Northern Kingdom of Israel; It was taken away by Assyria. But when they repopulated Samaria, it seems like Galilee was left out – left vacant…

And so the most obvious conclusion, is because it was good land and productive with fishing and whatnot, some of the Jews headed North and settled there and colonised it as their own… **Religiously**, they still saw Jerusalem as their capital. Even though they lived several days journey from Jerusalem, they would journey to Jerusalem for major events like the Passover….

Anyway, Galilee was a productive land, and the people were mostly workers: Farmers; fishermen; Traders… and all the other industries to support these. Jesus was raised as a carpenter; Some of his disciples were fishermen…

Galilee was the place you went, to make a go of yourself… *When I was researching this, I was reminded of the way Australia was developed… NSW & Victoria were so much more developed, and QLD was only just getting going… And I think Galilee was similar to that… A land of opportunity, but you had to leave the big centres and places of education, and tough it out in the sticks…*

And as the inner-city elites often look down their noses at simple working country folk, that's the way it was in Jesus' day…

The people of Judea and especially Jerusalem, really looked down their noses at Galilee… In a way, they still saw it as the Northern Kingdom that separated from Judah. Not as bad as Samaria, but not as holy as Judeah…

And we get a hint of that in John 8, when they accuse Jesus of "being a Samaritan" and "having a demon"… For the people of Judea, being from Galilee, wasn't far removed from being one of them "despised Samaritans".

I find this incredible, that God chose for His Son, to live in a region that meant that the educated and spiritually elite, would look down on Him, and have a natural aversion to him, simply because of where He grew up…

You know, a lot of the teaching of Jesus, is "The last will be first, and the first will be last". And Jesus modelled that, in His own life… He was despised, and yet now He is the King of Kings, and Lord of Lords…

And as the suffering servant of God, He reached out to those who were cut off from God, and despised…

He never compromised the truth, but what He did, was He invited those who were far from God, to:

- turn away from what they believed;
- believe in **Him** as the Messiah; and
- receive whole-heartedly, the truth of God…

For us in Australia, in some ways, the Christian church is in danger of becoming like the Samaritans… where we worship God, but we mix it up with other stuff…

When I was a boy, I grew up at Goondiwindi, and we'd often meet with the Aboriginal Christians from Boggabilla… And when they would talk about faith and what it meant for them to be a Christian, they were adamant, that had to totally reject their old indigenous religion. They recognised that that was a thing of demons, and it was incompatible with the worship of Christ…

That's how they understood it then…

But now, I'm increasingly hearing a message, that "indigenous spirituality" and Christ can be combined… And I've even

heard some people proclaim that the stories of the dreamtime actually contained references to Jesus…

It's the same detestable thing – to mix false religion, in with Christianity…

But let's bring it closer to home. We white folk, we're no better…
Some want to:

- mix Yoga in with their Christianity;
- add other forms of eastern mysticism;
- live worldly lives, embracing Greed as much as they embrace Jesus;
- just add a bit of Jesus to whatever sinful life they're living…

But the way of Christ is so radical, Jesus described it as being born again…

- Die to self;
- Die to all other gods;
- Die to all other spirituality;
- Die to all other cravings of the sinful heart

And we are born again into Christ Jesus…
Repent of sin, and believe in Him.
Saved, by the blood of Jesus…

Amen.