

Jesus Asked Her for Help

The Woman at the Well and Jesus' Longest Conversation

In the following paragraphs, I want to re-introduce you to a familiar character: the woman at the well from Samaria we read

about in John 4. She is a character with whom most church-goers are at least familiar. Unfortunately, we were not given her name in the biblical account. However, for ease in discussion, I'll use the name **Photini** as she is known in the Eastern Orthodox tradition (For a more detailed description from the Orthodox perspective, see <http://www.antiochian.org/st-photini-samaritan-woman>).

Photini had several obstacles working against her—even today, in our willingness to hear her story.

Read John 4:1-18

What was the occasion that caused Jesus to meet with Photini? (See 4:4-6)

- Many of us have been taught that she was promiscuous since Christ revealed that he knew she had had five husbands before the man she was currently living with. Yet, there is no biblical evidence for promiscuity. There are a variety of reasons why that could have been her situation.
- She was a woman, and a rabbi and a woman would never have been talking in public in that era.
- She was a Samaritan, the mixed race despised and avoided by the Jews of that day.
- She was coming to the well in the middle of the day, which seems to indicate that there was some reason for her not to come in the earlier, cooler part of the day. We can only make assumptions about that.

What did Jesus offer Photini?

What Jesus Did and Did Not Do and Photini's Firsts

In spite of those characteristics that should have caused Jesus, a respected rabbi, to shy away from an

encounter with her, he intentionally chose to sit down at the very well she would be using. And then, he, the Creator of the universe and of the woman and of the very water in that well, proceeded to ask *her* for help and then have **the longest theological conversation we have in the Bible between Jesus and another person!**

Read John 4:19-26

What topics did they discuss?

What did Jesus reveal to her in John 4:26?

Why do you think Jesus chose this woman to be the first person he would reveal himself to as the Messiah?



Christ and the Samaritan Woman at the Well
by Angelica Kauffman (1796)

Read John 4:27-42

Note: the disciples are out *shopping* while Jesus is having this theological discussion about the place and purpose of true worship with Photini! She then leaves that life-changing conversation to become **the first evangelist in the gospel record**. Now, if Jesus knew about her five husbands, I am pretty sure he knew what she was going to do upon her return to her village. Yet, he did not stop her from being that evangelist. He did not send the male disciples running after her to stop her. Instead, he points out to them that the harvest they are about to reap (of people, not grain) was a result of her work. See John 4:39. **This is the first time a whole community believed in Jesus—and they were not Jews!** What an example of extensive, enthusiastic evangelism! **She was essential in helping Jesus accomplish his mission in that place at that time.** How can this detail about this "unlikely evangelist" to a whole community of non-Jews inspire girls and women today whom Jesus is calling to serve and to lead others to him?

A hurting world is depending on us as informed leaders to demonstrate the equality, justice, and freedom proclaimed by Christ.