

**The Tree of Life is a weekly teaching summary.  
The Tree of Life for week ending 03/21/04.**

*Forgiveness*

**Luke 7:36-50, Mat 18:21-35**

**Philippians 4:8** *“From now on, members of the Royal Family of God, whatever is true [doctrinal], whatever is honorable [worthy of respect], whatever is just [fair or right] let your mind dwell on these things.”*

We have begun to look at our Lord’s mind was dwelling upon mistreated and tortured. His thoughts are revealed in a magnificent way in the last seven statements that He made on the Cross. When our Lord was doing His greatest work on earth, suffering on the Cross for the sins of the whole world, He was uttering some of His greatest words.

1. **Luk 23:34**, *“Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.”*
2. **Luk 23:43**, *“Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise.”*
3. **Joh 19:26-27**, *“Woman, behold, your son! Son, behold, your mother!”*
4. **Mat 27:46**, *“Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?” that is, “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?”*
5. **Joh 19:28**, *“I am thirsty.”*
6. **Joh 19:30**, *“It is finished!”*
7. **Luk 23:46**, *“Father, into Thy hands I commit My spirit.”*

At times it is very difficult for us to forgive people, and it is very easy to harbor an unforgiving spirit. However, to be a Christian means to forgive the inexcusable, because God has forgiven the inexcusable in you. Forgiveness means to give up resentment, excuse a guilty party, release from payment, and forget an offense *never bringing it up again*, not even to discuss it. The ultimate expression of forgiveness is found in our Lord’s words, *“Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.”* The greatest illustration of forgiveness is the Cross itself, where all the personal sins of the human race were imputed to our Lord Jesus Christ.

Our Lord demonstrates His graciousness in forgiving someone who was guilty in **Luk 7:36-50**; verse 36 reads, *“Now one of the Pharisees was requesting Him to dine with him. And He entered the Pharisee’s house, and reclined at the table.”* Simon the Pharisee was a *user*. He wanted to use Jesus to gain power with the crowds following Him. Often these meals were eaten in the courtyard, and when a rabbi was at the meal, people came in to hear his wisdom. When a guest entered such a house, three protocols were always followed. First, the host placed his hands on the guest’s shoulder and gave him the kiss of peace as a mark of respect. Secondly, since the roads were dusty and dirty and they wore sandals, their feet became dirty; therefore, water was poured over the guest’s feet to cleanse them. Thirdly, a pinch of sweet-smelling incense was burned or a drop of aroma of roses was placed on the guest’s head as an anointing. However, none of these were offered to the Lord when He entered. Yet His attitude of grace and restoration was the same toward the Pharisees, the tax collectors, and prostitutes.

There is a sudden interruption, and a woman enters uninvited, **Luk 7:37-38**, “*And behold, there was a woman in the city who was a prostitute; and when she learned that He was reclining at the table in the Pharisee’s house, she brought an alabaster vial of perfume, and standing behind Him at His feet, weeping, she began to wet His feet with her tears, and kept wiping them with the hair of her head, and kissing His feet, and anointing them with the perfume.*” She had great humility. There is no happiness for arrogant, legalistic people who are always trying to straighten someone else out.

Flowing from this woman’s heart are feelings of *gratitude* in her love and praise for the Lord Jesus Christ. In the ancient world, “proper” women keep their hair up in public, but she lets her hair down to wipe away her tears from her Savior’s feet. And she kisses them and pours out her precious perfume, perhaps her most valuable possession, and the Lord accepts it. He was not embarrassed in spite of her reputation. In **Luk 7:39**, “*Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he said to himself, ‘If this man were a prophet He would know who and what sort of person this woman is who is touching Him, that she is a prostitute.’*”

The legalistic Pharisee thought to himself that Jesus could not possibly be a prophet, since He let such a person touch Him. He made two pre-judgments and both were wrong. First, he misjudged the Lord Jesus Christ by expecting Him to condemn the woman instead of forgiving her. Secondly, he misjudged the woman and her motives and her spiritual state. Rather than recognizing what a marvelous occurrence it is to see a person freed from guilt through the Lord Jesus Christ, he judges both her and the Lord. However, the Lord proves a greater discernment than knowing the sins of the woman by knowing the thoughts of Simon himself, **Luk 7:40-42**, “*And Jesus answered and said to him [even though Simon has not said anything out loud], ‘Simon, I have something to say to you.’ And he replied, ‘Say it, Teacher.’ ‘A certain moneylender had two debtors: one owed five hundred denarii [a denarius is a Roman silver coin worth one day’s wages], and the other fifty. When they were unable to repay, he graciously forgave them both. Which of them therefore will love him more?’*”

Simon answers cautiously because he does not want to pronounce guilt on himself, **Luk 7:43**, “*Simon answered and said, ‘I suppose the one whom he forgave more.’ And He said to him, ‘You have judged correctly.’*” The Lord Jesus Christ now demonstrates His grace in a magnificent way, **Luk 7:44-47**, “*And turning toward the woman, He said to Simon [He has his back to the Pharisee as he addresses him], ‘Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has wet My feet with her tears, and wiped them with her hair. You gave Me no kiss; but she, since the time I came in, has not ceased to kiss My feet. You did not anoint My head with oil, but she anointed My feet with perfume. For this gracious reason [how charin] I say to you, her sins, which are many, have been forgiven [apheontai], for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little.’*”

One who senses that he is the chief of sinners will feel under infinite obligation to love God for all that He has forgiven him. However, this Pharisee is sitting there completely unaware of the enormity of his own sinfulness. **Luk 7:48-50** continues, “*And He said to her, ‘Your sins have been forgiven [the most wonderful words she would ever hear for all of her life].’ And those who were reclining at the table with Him began to say to themselves, ‘Who is this man who even forgives sins?’ [The others at the banquet were negative to the Gospel, as was Simon, but they had the same opportunity to believe as*

this woman did.] *And He said* [face-to-face to the woman, as He turned His back on the legalistic Pharisees], *‘Your faith has saved you; go in peace.’*” To protect her, Jesus gives her a command to go. The happiest person in the city was the one who left the courtyard that day, forgiven and free.

1. Simon’s walled-off courtyard of self-righteousness reminds us that pride paralyzes us. It deadens us to our need and numbs our feelings of gratitude toward God.
2. The sobbing woman’s peace shows us that forgiveness releases us. We are happiest when we are forgiven—free of spiritual debt, guilt, and shame.
3. Jesus’ acceptance of the woman tells us that faith delivers us. Because of her love for Christ, she entered the Pharisee’s house to offer her sweet gift. She risked ridicule and disgrace, but she came anyway. Faith means coming to the Lord Jesus Christ, knowing He will accept us just as we are.

The pattern of forgiveness shown by our Lord in **Luk 23:34** is applied to the believer as part of the Royal Family honor code, **Col 3:13**. The believer actually benefits from this act of forgiveness than the one who is forgiven! Believers are *commanded* to forgive one another, **Eph 4:32**, and this necessary for fellowship and unity in a local assembly. Forgiving others also allows God to handle the situation, **Rom 12:19**. Our works are unprofitable if we hold resentment, **Mat 5:23-24**. If you do not forgive others, you cannot be filled with the Spirit and cannot serve the Lord. If you make others suffer and pay for what they have done to you, you will be the one who suffers and pays. We must forgive others for our prayers to be heard, **Mat 6:14-15**. If we ask for forgiveness we also must give it!

Refusal to forgive advances Satan’s plan, as seen in **1Co 5:1-6,9-13**, where a believer was committing sexual sins with his father’s wife and the Corinthians were actually boasting about it: *“It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father’s wife. And you have become arrogant, and have not mourned instead, in order that the one who had done this deed might be removed from your midst. For I, on my part, though absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged him who has so committed this, as though I were present. In the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled, and I with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus, I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that **a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough?**...”*

*“I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters; for then you would have to go out of the world. But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he should be an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler—not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the church? But those who are outside, God judges. **Remove the wicked man from among yourselves.**”*

They removed this individual from among themselves, and the result was that he repented! That is why God tells us to separate from believers who are slanderous, judgmental, and critical, and who have violated the Royal family honor code, **2Th 3:14**.

However, this man in Corinth had repented, but the Corinthians would not take him back into the local assembly, **2Co 2:5-11**. Satan causes divisions in local assemblies by using legalistic believers to condemn others who have sinned. Healing can only take place through forgiveness. In **Jam 5:15-16**, the early church in Jerusalem was told to confess their faults to each other because they were experiencing sickness because they would not forgive others. This church was filled with judging and gossiping, which caused divisions, resentment, and sickness. They needed to forgive each other and be reconciled.

People of the world naturally want to be in charge, to be the master of their own fate. But the greatest Man who ever lived came not as the ruler, but as the servant, and when you come to know Him, you want to be like Him. In **Mat 20:28**, *“The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”* All power comes from God. Whatever God expects you to do as an individual, He gave you the power, the grace, and the energy to do. Then, all praise goes back to God. He gave the power, he deserves the praise, and the servant readily admits that, when under the control of the Holy Spirit. This is the attitude of a *servant*, especially in the realm of forgiveness.

When it comes to the matter of forgiveness, we usually have double standards; we all want to be forgiven, yet we are not always willing to forgive. Everyone is in great need of forgiveness throughout life, because we are failures. Some are in need of being forgiven by someone they have offended, and the one offended needs to forgive; this is a continued journey that we all must travel. It is in this context that Paul writes in **2Co 2:4-7**, *“For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you with many tears; not that you should be made sorrowful, but that you might know the love which I have especially for you. But if any has caused sorrow, he has caused sorrow not to me, but in some degree, in order not to say too much, to all of you. Sufficient for such a one is this punishment which was inflicted by the majority, so that on the contrary **you should rather forgive and comfort him**, lest somehow such a one be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow.”* This is in reference to the man mentioned in **1Co 5**, who had an illicit relationship with a woman his father had married. Paul is saying that they should reaffirm their love for him and forgive and comfort him.

Many believers misunderstand what a gracious local assembly is. They misunderstand the grace of God and what true liberty is. **Gal 5:1** bears repeating: *“It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.”* It is strange that believers think that carnality is liberated spirituality, when, in fact, it is the Adamic nature expressing itself according to its fleshly desires and lust.

One of our greatest tests of servant-hood in all of our life will take place in the area of forgiveness. In **Mat 18:21**, *“Peter came and said to Him, ‘Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?’”* His question is a simple one: what are the limits to forgiveness? The scribes and rabbis taught that if a person sins against you, forgive him three times, so Peter goes for seven. Our Lord responds in **Mat 18:22**, *“Jesus said to him, ‘I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to **seventy times seven**.’”* True forgiveness is limitless.

Throughout life, you will have an infinite number of occasions to apply forgiveness. As long as you live, someone will offend you, or you will be offending someone else! We need to have an infinite capacity to forgive. When God calls on a member of his kingdom to forgive, He is not calling on him to renounce or give up a

“right,” because in reality he has no right in the matter at all, as illustrated by the Lord’s parable in **Mat 18:23-25**, “*For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a certain king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. And when he had begun to settle them, there was brought to him one who owed him **ten thousand talents** [more money than a slave would ever see]]. But since he did not have the means to repay, his Lord commanded him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all that he had, and repayment to be made.’”*

Under the customs of the ancient world, if someone could not pay what they owed you, you could take their property even sell them and their family as slaves, as in **2Ki 4:1, Neh 5:8**. Our Lord goes on in **Mat 18:26**, “*The slave therefore falling down, prostrated himself before him, saying, ‘Have patience with me, and I will repay you everything.’”* This statement simply shows the extreme fear of the moment, which made him promise something impossible—“I will repay everything!” The king certainly realized there was no way the slave could ever repay the debt. However, what the king noticed in the heart of the slave was a spirit of humility, and in **Mat 18:27**, “*The lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt.* Compassion is what motivates forgiveness, and God is infinitely compassionate. Three great events take place in these verses: (1) the Lord of the slave felt compassion, (2) he released him (the release of the sinner), and (3), he forgave him the debt (the forgiveness of the wrong). What a perfect analogy to the Father’s forgiveness of us as sinners!

Remember the words of the Lord Jesus Christ when He taught His disciples to pray: “*Forgive us our trespasses, even as we forgive those who trespass against us.*” Giving and receiving forgiveness are links in the same chain. You do not adequately forgive a trespasser unless you see that it is based on how God has forgiven you. The most generous debt that will ever be paid has already been paid by our Lord.

The story takes a serious turn in **Mat 18:28**, “*But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him **a hundred denarii** [100 days’ wages]; and he seized him and began to choke him, saying, ‘Pay back what you owe.’” This is a picture of believers who want unlimited forgiveness from God, but will not forgive others! He went out from the presence of the Lord and found someone who was indebted to him. He has already forgotten the benefits he received from his Lord. The small sum is mentioned reveals how little man can offend his fellow man compared with how we have all offended God. **Mat 18:29-34** continues, “*So his fellow slave fell down and began to entreat him, saying, ‘Have patience with me and I will repay you.’ He was unwilling however, but went and threw him in prison until he should pay back what was owed. So when his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were deeply grieved and came and reported to their lord all that had happened. Then summoning him, his lord said to him, ‘You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you entreated me. Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, even as I had mercy on you?’ [The guilt laid upon him is that, having received mercy and forgiveness, he remains unmerciful and unforgiving toward others.] And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him.” This is divine discipline on the believer who is unforgiving.**

This is a marvelous expression of what happens when we refuse to forgive one another. It is an accurate description of the tormenting resentment and bitterness, and the animosity of hate and envy. It is a terrible feeling when we feel the acid of resentment

and hate eating away at our peace and calm. And our Lord concludes in **Mat 18:35**, “*So shall My heavenly Father also do to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart.*”

If someone has wronged you, and you do not forgive them in your heart, you have had it in the spiritual life! This is where the principle of **Dan 9:9** applies: “*To God belongs mercy and forgiveness.*” To have forgiveness toward others we must know God! It is through occupation with the Lord Jesus Christ that we develop a capacity to forgive. And this means the ability to forgive *yourself* for your own wrongdoings, and forgive others for what they have done to you.

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