

Shalom AZ Ministries

In Pursuit of Israel's Redemption



The Mission Has a Name: *Zacchaeus as a Microcosm of the Gospel Mission*

Rabbi Cosmo Panzetta

Devotion and Discussion Questions

Key Texts (TLV): Luke 19:1-10; Luke 18:31-34; Luke 18:18-27; Luke 4:37; Genesis 3:8-10

Yeshua was passing through Jericho. That detail matters. He was not looking for a place to stay, not planning to linger, not stopping to receive the honor of the respectable people in town. He was on His way to Jerusalem, nearing the place where He would be mocked, insulted, spat upon, scourged, killed, and raised on the third day. Yeshua was a man on a mission – a mission to “seek and to save that which was lost” – and nothing would deter Him from offering up His life to that end.

And yet, as He carried the weight of that world-saving mission, He stopped for one man. Zacchaeus was *mikros* (μικρός)—small in stature, small in the eyes of the crowd, and hidden in the branches of a sycamore tree. But this “micro” man becomes a microcosm of the whole Gospel mission. The Kingdom of God is big. Saving the world is big. But the world Yeshua came to save is a world of ones—people made in the image of God, each with a name, a story, a wound, a sin, a shame, and a house into which salvation must come. The mission of God is particular. It is personal. His mission has a name.

1. THE MISSION SEES THE ONE WHO IS SMALL AND HIDDEN

Zacchaeus wanted to see who Yeshua was. He was not merely trying to catch a glimpse of a famous rabbi passing through town; he was seeking, investigating, trying to know who this Yeshua really was. By now, Yeshua had a reputation. He proclaimed the good news of the Kingdom, healed the sick, raised the dead, and had just given sight to a blind man near Jericho. But perhaps the part of Yeshua's reputation that most stirred Zacchaeus was this: Yeshua was known as a friend of sinners. He ate with tax collectors. One despised tax collector, Matthew, had even become one of His twelve.

But Zacchaeus had a problem. There was a crowd, and crowds were dangerous for men like him. He was not merely disliked; he was despised. As chief tax collector, he was seen as a traitor, a collaborator with Rome, a man who had profited from the suffering of his own people. And because he was short, he could not see over the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree. He laid aside his dignity just to see Yeshua, but he also climbed into the leaves because he wanted to remain hidden. He wanted to see without being seen. That is often how shame works in us too. We want to know whether Yeshua is as merciful as we have heard, but part of us still wants to stay covered.

2. THE MISSION CALLS THE ONE WHO IS KNOWN AND LOST

Zacchaeus was hidden in the tree, but he was not hidden from Yeshua. When Yeshua came to the place, He looked up and called him by name. Zacchaeus had not called out like the blind man had. He had not shouted, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” He had climbed into the tree quietly, hoping to observe from a safe distance. But Yeshua took the initiative. Yeshua stopped. Yeshua looked up. Yeshua called his name. The lost are not nameless to Him.

That is both comforting and terrifying. Yeshua knows our names, but He also knows what we have done. He knows every insult that could rightly be thrown our way. He knows the ways we have been wounded, and He knows the ways we have wounded others. He knows when we have been the oppressed, and He knows when we have acted more like the oppressor. We cannot hide from Him in a crowd, and we cannot hide from Him in a tree. But His knowledge of us does not keep Him from calling us. His holiness does not make Him pass us by. His mercy moves toward the hidden one and says, "Come out of hiding."

3. THE MISSION SAVES THE ONE AND RESTORES THE HOUSE

Yeshua shocked the crowd. Everyone probably expected Him to rebuke Zacchaeus, expose him, condemn him, and demand that he clean up his life before receiving any kindness. But instead, Yeshua invited Himself into Zacchaeus' home. He had already passed through Jericho, already given the respectable people of the city the impression that He was not staying. But now He reverses course for this one man. He goes out of His way for Zacchaeus, and in doing so, He takes Zacchaeus' reproach upon Himself. The crowd grumbled, "*Yeshua has gone to be the guest of a sinner!*"

Yeshua did not excuse Zacchaeus' sin. He did not pretend oppression was harmless. But He also did not reject the sinner. He offered relationship first, and Zacchaeus responded to that kindness with genuine repentance – repentance in word *AND* repentance in action. He pledged to give half of his possessions to the poor and to repay fourfold anyone he had cheated. That is the difference between repentance and damage control. Damage control tries to protect reputation. Repentance seeks to set things right as much as possible. Zacchaeus' righteous behavior is not what made Yeshua come find him. Doing the right thing was Zacchaeus' response to the love of God.

CONCLUSION

It's easy to look at people like Zacchaeus from the outside and assume they need nothing. He was rich. He was powerful. He may have looked like he had everything and didn't care about his inner condition. But Zacchaeus needed rescue. He needed Yeshua. And this story reminds us not to limit who God can save. He can save the poor, the rich, the wounded, the guilty... the one hiding in shame. He can even save the one whose sin has harmed others. Yeshua came to seek and save the lost, and in Zacchaeus we see that mission take on flesh and blood, a name and a face, a house and a table.

And maybe today you are the one hiding behind leaves. Maybe you want to see Yeshua, but you are afraid to be seen by Him. Maybe you feel too small, too ashamed, too guilty, too compromised, or too far gone. But Yeshua sees you. He knows your name. He calls you out of hiding, not to humiliate you, but to fellowship with you, redeem you, restore you, and make you new. Come down from the tree of shame and hiding. Open your life to Him today. The kindness He offered Zacchaeus was costly, and not long after this encounter, Yeshua would bear all our reproach through His death. But to the Lord, Zacchaeus was worth it. And so are you. The Mission of God has a name, and that name includes your name.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Zacchaeus wanted to see Yeshua, but he also wanted to remain hidden. Where do you see that tension in your own life—the desire to know the Lord, but the fear of being fully seen by Him?
2. Why is it significant that Yeshua called Zacchaeus by name before Zacchaeus made any public confession or restitution?
3. The crowd saw Zacchaeus mainly through the lens of his sin and betrayal. Are there people today whom we are tempted to believe are beyond the reach of God’s mercy?
4. Zacchaeus’ repentance included practical steps to repair harm. What is the difference between true repentance and simply trying to manage consequences or protect our reputation?
5. The mission of Yeshua is global, but it is also personal—a world of ones. How might this change the way we see people in our family, congregation, workplace, or community?

CLOSING PRAYER:

Father, thank You that Your mission is not vague, distant, or impersonal. You came to seek and save the lost, and You see each one of us by name. Thank You that when we hide in shame, You do not pass us by. You stop. You look up. You call us out of hiding with mercy.

Search our hearts and lead us into true repentance. Help us not to settle for damage control, but to respond to Your kindness with surrendered lives. Teach us to see others the way You saw Zacchaeus—not as hopeless cases, but as people You came to seek, save, redeem, and restore. May salvation come to our homes, and may our lives become living witnesses that Your mission still has a name.

B'Shem Yeshua, In the name of Yeshua, amen.