

# Luke 19:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And he ran before, and climbed up into a sycomore tree to see him: for he was to pass that way.

## Analysis

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**And he ran before, and climbed up into a sycomore tree to see him: for he was to pass that way.** The verb *prodrāmōn* (προδραμών, "ran before") describes Zacchaeus racing ahead of the crowd—undignified behavior for a wealthy official in ancient Near Eastern culture, where prominent men walked with measured dignity. His climbing into a sycamore tree (*sykomorean*, συκομόραν) was even more humiliating. This wasn't the mulberry sycamore of Europe but the fig-mulberry (*Ficus sycomorus*), common in Jericho, with low branches suitable for climbing but requiring him to scramble up in full view of the mocking crowd.

The phrase "to see him" (*hina idē auton, ἵνα ἵδη αὐτόν*) expresses purpose—his entire undignified performance had one goal: seeing Jesus. The detail "for he was to pass that way" (*hoti ekeinēs ēmellen dierchesthai, ὅτι ἐκείνης ἤμελλεν διέρχεσθαι*) shows Zacchaeus's strategic planning. He anticipated Jesus's route and positioned himself accordingly. This combination of desperate urgency (running, climbing) and strategic wisdom (choosing the right tree) illustrates faith that acts decisively while depending on Christ's sovereign movement.

## Historical Context

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Sycamore trees were abundant in Jericho's warm climate and grew to considerable height with spreading branches near the ground. These trees lined the roads and provided shade in the hot Jordan Valley. For a wealthy chief tax collector to climb a tree was scandalous—it exposed him to ridicule and demonstrated a complete

abandonment of social dignity. In shame-based culture, such behavior was almost unthinkable. Yet Zacchaeus's actions parallel Jesus's teaching that entering God's kingdom requires becoming like a child (Luke 18:17)—humble, undignified, dependent.

## Related Passages

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**Ephesians 2:8** — Salvation by grace through faith

**Romans 10:9** — Confession and belief for salvation

## Study Questions

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1. What social and personal costs did Zacchaeus pay by running and climbing the tree publicly?
2. How does Zacchaeus's combination of urgency and planning model both faith and works?
3. In what ways does climbing the tree demonstrate the humility Jesus requires for entering the kingdom?

## Interlinear Text

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καὶ προδραμὼν ἔμπροσθεν ἀνέβη ἐπὶ συκομωραίαν,  
And he ran before and climbed up into a sycomore tree  
G2532 G4390 G1715 G305 G1909 G4809

ἵνα ἵδη αὐτόν ὅτι δι' ἐκείνης ἥμελλεν διέρχεσθαι  
to see him for that he was to pass  
G2443 G1492 G846 G3754 G1223 G1565 G3195 G1330

## Additional Cross-References

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**Isaiah 9:10** (Parallel theme): The bricks are fallen down, but we will build with hewn stones: the sycomores are cut down, but we will change them into cedars.

**1 Chronicles 27:28** (Parallel theme): And over the olive trees and the sycomore trees that were in the low plains was Baal-hanan the Gederite: and over the cellars of oil was Joash:

**1 Kings 10:27** (Parallel theme): And the king made silver to be in Jerusalem as stones, and cedars made he to be as the sycomore trees that are in the vale, for abundance.

**Amos 7:14** (Parallel theme): Then answered Amos, and said to Amaziah, I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet's son; but I was an herdman, and a gatherer of sycomore fruit:

**Psalms 78:47** (Parallel theme): He destroyed their vines with hail, and their sycomore trees with frost.

**Luke 5:19** (Parallel theme): And when they could not find by what way they might bring him in because of the multitude, they went upon the housetop, and let him down through the tiling with his couch into the midst before Jesus.