



Discussion Guide

Date: 3/29/2026

Sermon Title: Is winning everything?

Scripture: Matthew 21:1-11

This discussion guide is a layout to be used with a group or class. We have included opening and closing prayers to start and end your group. The guide may be used for personal or family reflection as well.

OPENING PRAYER

Gracious and humble King, you entered not in power as the world understands it, but in gentleness and peace. As we gather, open our hearts to see beyond the illusions of success, power, and winning that surround us. Help us to receive You as You truly are—not as we expect or desire. Shape us into people who follow Your way of humility, love, and surrender. In the name of Christ, who reigns in a different kind of glory, we pray. Amen

OPENING QUESTIONS:

1. Share a time when you experienced a "loss" that later turned out to be a blessing or victory in disguise?

OPENING CONTEXT:

In a culture that tells us winning is everything, Jesus reveals a different kind of victory—one marked by humility, surrender, and sacrificial love. Palm Sunday invites us to wrestle with what true “winning” looks like in the kingdom of God.

EXPLORING THE TEXT:

Read Matthew 21:1–11 (NRSV). Using additional translations may be helpful for you in wrestling with the text.

1. What details in this passage stand out to you about how Jesus enters Jerusalem?
2. Why do you think Jesus chose to ride on a donkey instead of a horse? (See supporting text: Zechariah 9:9 NRSV)
3. What do the crowds shout, and what do they seem to believe about Jesus?
4. What does the word “Hosanna” mean (save us / save now), and how does that shape our understanding of the moment?
5. What kind of “victory” do you think the crowd expected from Jesus?
6. How does Jesus’ way of entering Jerusalem challenge those expectations?
7. In what ways do we sometimes want Jesus to “win” on our terms?
8. How does this moment foreshadow the kind of “victory” Jesus will accomplish later in the week?

CONNECTING WITH OTHER SCRIPTURE:

6. Read Philippians 2:5–11 (NRSV). How does this passage deepen our understanding of Jesus’ humility and kingship?

7. Read John 12:23–25 (NRSV). What does Jesus teach about losing life in order to gain it?

Wesleyan & Methodist Reflection:

John Wesley emphasized *holy love* over worldly success. He warned against ambition rooted in pride and instead called believers to humility and service: “The kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.” Wesley’s understanding of salvation was not about triumph over others, but transformation into Christlikeness.

The waving of palms celebrates Christ as King. Yet it also foreshadows the Passion narrative. This tension reminds us that this is the same crowd that cries “Hosanna” will soon cry “Crucify.” In worship, we hold together celebration and confession; recognizing how often we misunderstand Christ’s mission.

OTHER SCRIPTURES TO DIG DEEPER:

Zechariah 9:9; Philippians 2:5–11; Matthew 16:24–26; 1 Corinthians 1:25–29; John 18:36

SERMON QUESTIONS:

1. Pastor Clayton opens with the quote, “Winning isn’t everything, it’s the only thing” by Vince Lombardi. We know this isn’t true, but where do we get trapped by this lie that culture keeps telling us?
2. How does our culture define "winning" today? Where do you see the "winning is everything" mentality in your daily life (work, relationships, social media, etc.)?
3. The sermon mentions many things that are different than a Roman victory parade with Jesus entering Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. How does the contrast between the Roman victory parade and Jesus' Palm Sunday entrance reveal different definitions of winning that compete in our world today?
4. The idea of winning in the eyes of Jesus is contrary of our idea and the worlds. How has Jesus changed your mind of what it means to win, be successful, and to conqueror?
5. Pastor Clayton mentions three illusions exposed by the cross. Which of these resonates most with you personally?
 - a. Power vs. Love
 - b. Success vs. Sacrifice
 - c. Control vs. Surrender
6. The sermon ends with a Denis the Menace cartoon in Pastor Clayton’s office. How does understanding the cross as a 'big plus sign' rather than just a symbol of suffering change the way you view hardship and sacrifice in your own life?



APPLYING IT ALL:

1. What would it look like for you to follow Jesus' way of humility this week?
2. How might our communities and churches look different if we truly embraced the cross as a symbol of sacrificial love rather than just a religious icon?
3. In what areas of your life are you currently striving to "win" by the world's standards? How might God be calling you to a different kind of victory?
4. Where do you struggle most with surrender? Is it in your:
 - a. Career or ambitions?
 - b. Relationships?
 - c. Plans for the future?
 - d. Need for control?
 - e. Desire for recognition?
5. What would it look like for you to "empty yourself" this week? What might you need to let go of to follow Jesus' example?
6. What illusions of power, success, or control do you need to surrender in order to experience the reality of God's love and presence?

CLOSING PRAYER:

Lord Jesus, you are the King who comes in humility, not force. In love, not domination but in surrender, not self-protection. Forgive us for the ways we chase after the world's version of winning. Forgive us for the times we have misunderstood Your kingdom. Teach us to walk Your way in choosing humility over pride, service over status, faithfulness over success. Shape us into people who trust that Your way, even when it looks like loss, is the truest victory of all. We lay down our expectations and take up Your cross. In Your holy name we pray, Amen.

WAYS TO RESPOND:

Choose ONE of the following practices to focus on this week:

1. Identify one area where you're trying to maintain control. Each day, pray: "Not my will, but your will be done" regarding this situation. Journal about what happens when you release control
2. Choose sacrifice over success by looking for one opportunity to put someone else's needs before your own ambitions. Reflect on how this made you feel and what you learned
3. Respond with love instead of power when you're in a conflict or disagreement this week. Choose to respond with love rather than trying to "win" the argument. Ask yourself: "What would sacrificial love look like in this moment?"
4. Study the Passion Week and read through the events of Holy Week (Matthew 21-28, Mark 11-16, Luke 19-24, or John 12-21) Each day, reflect on how Jesus demonstrated victory through surrender.