

**Matthew 21:1-11** *When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, "Who is this?" The crowds answered, "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee."*

*Kingdoms in Conflict* is the title of a book written by Charles Colson. Colson served five years as special counsel to the president during the Nixon administration and then served a prison term for his part in the Watergate scandal. He spent much of his time in jail reading the Bible, and it proved to be a turning point in his life.

Colson's book, *Kingdoms in Conflict*, is a political insider's penetrating view of the ongoing conflict between the kingdom of God and the kingdoms of men. Nothing dramatizes that age-old conflict more powerfully than what happened on Palm Sunday. Palm Sunday portrays Jesus to us not as a king who wields political power, but as a king who penetrates hearts with the power of his love. It presents Jesus to us as a humble and gentle king, totally unique. **He is the King of Hearts.** And while he's not what the world wants, he is what the world needs. And as we...

When it comes to heads of state, the world loves pomp and a good show—even if those heads of state are mere figureheads like Queen Elizabeth of Great Britain or King Harald of Norway. In a PBS documentary about England's monarchy, some of the Queen's loyal subjects were asked their opinions about the monarchy's future. One commoner suggested that the Queen had outlived her usefulness and that she cost taxpayers too much money. But, he said, she won't go because she puts on a good show. We don't have a king or a queen in this country, but the pomp and circumstance that surround our president would be the envy of any Pharaoh or Emperor or monarch. All that pomp suggests something about people's attitudes.

In one biography on President Lincoln, the author suggests that "Lincoln was much

too homely ever to have succeeded in politics in the television age." Sounds like what Isaiah said about Jesus: "**He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him**" (53:2). There were no trappings of royalty surrounding Jesus, even when he was welcomed and acclaimed as King on Palm Sunday. No, Isaiah says: "**He was despised and rejected by men. . . . Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not**" (53:3).

What the world wants is a king who can produce, one who can ensure an easy life and a good time for all. That's one reason why Boris Yeltsin had such a rough time in Russia. He was the first president of the Russian Federation. He promised reforms aimed at putting food on the table, a car in the garage, and a tractor down on the farm. But he wasn't getting the job done fast enough. So his political enemies gladly traded him in for someone that would give them what they wanted.

Are we so different? How many times haven't we wanted Jesus, our King, to ensure an easy life for us? After all, we're Christians, right? We deserve better than all those others sinners, don't we? How many times haven't troubles and hardships come into our lives and we accuse with our cries, "*Why?! How could you let this happen to me, God?!*" How many times haven't we EXPECTED Jesus to provide not just for our daily needs but for all our wants, too.

There were expectations like that in the hearts of people in Jesus' day too—especially after he fed the five thousand with five barley loaves and two small fish. The next day people tried to take him by force and make him their king. Small wonder.

But Jesus offers neither a good show nor an easy life. He's no king of diamonds wearing a golden tiara. He didn't come to Jerusalem on the equivalent of the royal yacht Britannia or the equivalent of Air Force One. No, he came on a donkey because he wanted to send an important message to those people then and now to us too. He didn't come to establish an earthly kingdom. He came to establish a heavenly one. And on Palm Sunday the multitudes

who found something about him so appealing, quickly changed their minds. Somehow that donkey just didn't fit the bill for them. They couldn't see Jesus as a possible successor to King David, their national hero. Jesus and his heavenly kingdom is not what the world wants.

And yet, while Jesus is not what the world wants, he is exactly what the world needs. He is a king like no other king the world has ever known. He stands in sharp contrast to all worldly rulers, including the ones who typified him in Old Testament prophecy.

Recall a few examples of that contrast. Jesus once let little children interrupt one of his "cabinet meetings" with his inner circle of disciples. He let people like Zacchaeus and Mary Magdalene and Levi taint his public image. He let diseased folks and deformed cripples spoil his press conferences. And with a gentle rebuke, he declined Peter's offer to form a secret service and be Jesus' personal bodyguard. And on the eve of Palm Sunday, he came to the capital city, stood atop the Mount of Olives to survey the scene, and then wept tears over what he saw. Can you imagine a king or a queen or a president doing that today—unless it were for political gain?

With that picture in mind, you can easily sense the sarcasm in the voices of those who asked Jesus, "When *will* this kingdom of God come?" Brothers and sisters, it already has, and it keeps on coming every time someone is baptized, every time we kneel together at the Lord's Table, every time we share the Word with one another. It comes when the King of hearts, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, comes to you and me. It comes to you when you're Savior looks you in the eye and gives you his solemn oath that you are forgiven. It comes to you in the power of changed lives and loving hearts. It comes to you in the form of a fellowship of forgiven and forgiving sinners, a fellowship of caring, loving people who extend helping hands to others, a fellowship totally disinterested in reforming the world but totally absorbed in renewing hearts and lives, starting with our very own.

So, as you ponder what your King did on

Palm Sunday, thank God and rejoice that your Savior is not a king of clubs who sits on a throne and commands your allegiance with force. He's not a king of diamonds that is all glitzy pomp but has no power to change your eternal circumstance. Rather, he is a King of hearts who comes into your heart and wins your allegiance with his forgiving love. He doesn't treat us like peons, pawns, or peasants, but as lords and kings and priests of God called to communicate the power of his grace and love to our families, our friends, our neighbors, and to one another. It is with this understanding of who Jesus really is that we join today in saying: "***Hosanna to the Son of David. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.***" Amen.