November 22, 2026 | ***The King's Double Decree*** | Bob Koestler

Welcome and thanks for joining us today as it is Christ the King Sunday – the day on the liturgical calendar where we pause to declare that no matter what is happening in the world around us, we make the focus of our hope that Jesus Christ still sits on His throne and His kingdom will never end. Today we will work with two scripture readings so let's get right to it.

Ephesians 1:15-23 (NIV)

15 For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, 16 I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. 17 I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. 18 I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, 19 and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength 20 he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, 21 far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. 22 And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

And then from Matthew 25:31-46 NIV

***31** "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. **32** All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. **33** He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.*

***34** "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. **35** For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, **36** I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'*

***37** "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? **38** When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? **39** When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'*

***40** "The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'*

***41** "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. **42** For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, **43** I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.'*

***44** "They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?'*

***45** "He will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.'*

***46** "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.*

Let's pray and we'll get started

Almighty God, open our ears to hear and our hearts to receive you and your word today. May these words spoken transform our minds and renew our spirit. Let your truth anchor our soul as we look to the Heavenly throne of Christ. Amen

Once upon a time in a far-off country, there was an ancient king who was known to be simultaneously the most loving and the most just king who had ever existed. Eventually, it was discovered that somebody was stealing from the king's treasury, and because the king was just, he issued a decree. He said that when it was discovered who was stealing from his treasury, a sentence of ten lashes in front of the entire kingdom would be visited upon that person as the penalty for their disobedience.

The theft continued, and eventually, he issued a final decree: forty lashes would be visited upon the person who was stealing from the king's treasury. But watch this - forty lashes was a death sentence. So, he actually issued a death sentence with that decree.

As weeks went by, it was eventually discovered that none other than the daughter of the king was the one who was stealing from his treasury. When that was discovered, a question began to ripple through the kingdom. How could the most loving king who's ever

existed kill his own daughter? Some people thought that he would pardon her, but then how would he be just? Some people thought that he would punish her, but then how would he be loving?

Well, eventually, the king examined it and he said, "The law is clear. Sin has taken place. Justice must fall and the sentence must be passed."

So, the king's own daughter was brought in front of the entire kingdom, and when she got to the front, she was laid over an executioner's table. She was tied to the table. The executioner ripped open the back of her shirt and stepped back. But just as the executioner lifted his whip to issue the first lash, the king stood up from his throne and he yelled, "Stop!"

Everyone was in dismay. Silently, the king walked forward, bent over his daughter, wrapped his body around his her on the stump, ripped the shirt off of his own back, looked back at the executioner and said, "Now hit her."

The executioner objected, "King, I can't hit her without hitting you."

"Now hit her."

Forty lashes fell upon the back of the king as he wrapped the back of his daughter, and the king died, and the girl went free.

#1 You Stand Guilty but Covered in Prevenient Grace

This story is the absolute reality of what Jesus Christ did for you. As Christians, we are entering Thanksgiving week with this Sunday being marked as Christ the King Sunday. It is the perfect moment to reflect on how a heavenly Ruler handles human rebellion. Paul writes to Ephesus, *"I have not stopped giving thanks for you."* Why? Because He is looking at the Ephesian believers and thanking God for the invisible, preparatory work the Holy Spirit did in their hearts before they ever made a conscious choice to follow Christ.

This connects directly to what John Wesley termed prevenient grace - the love that goes before, the grace that woos you before you even know you need a Savior.

In today's world, society conditions you to view gratitude as a transaction. You are told to practice "mindfulness" and make gratitude lists only because it improves your mental health, reduces your cortisol levels, or attracts positive energy. It is entirely self-centric.

But the cross changes the entire architecture of thanksgiving. When you look at your life through the lens of prevenient grace, you realize that your entire existence is a gift you didn't ask for, sustained by a love you didn't earn. This shifts your perspective from a fragile, circumstance-based optimism to an unshakeable, theological rock. When the economy shifts, when your health fails, or when your family dynamic is strained during Thanksgiving week, you can still worship. Your gratitude is no longer a reaction to a comfortable week; it is a declaration that the King of the universe broke through time and space to rescue you before you even knew you needed a Savior. God's justice and love collided on a wooden cross for you.

#2 Opening the Eyes of Your Heart to Justification

Paul prays fiercely that *"the eyes of your heart may be enlightened."* In our modern world, you are completely flooded with sensory information. You look at your phone, you check the social media, and the eyes of your flesh see a narrative of scarcity, polarization, and personal anxiety. The world tells you that your value is entirely tied to what you produce, how you look, or how well you perform.

When Wesley talked about justifying grace, he described it as a radical shift in a believer's inner Experience. To have the eyes of your heart enlightened means you stop looking at your life through the lens of human performance. The Holy Spirit opens your spiritual eyes to realize that the King has already wrapped Himself around your brokenness. He has done the work. After the lashes of divine justice fell on Jesus and the nails had been driven into His hands and feet, He cried out, *"Tetelestai"* – "It is finished". The debt was entirely paid.

You are currently living in an era of unprecedented information and profound blindness. You spend hours a day scrolling through digital feeds that tell you exactly how you should feel, what you should fear, and what you lack. The world trains you to view reality through the lens of scarcity and hyper-individualism. You look at your bank accounts, the political polarization of this last election, and global instability, and the eyes of your flesh see a narrative of impending doom.

When the Holy Spirit justifies you, He completely changes your spiritual optics. The story of the King wrapping his body around his daughter reminds you that your core identity is no longer defined by your failures, your labels, or your cultural anxieties. Your ledger has been cleared. When you look at your family, your community, and your financial obligations this week, do it as an heir to a "glorious inheritance." You are liberated from the exhaustion of modern self-justification because the King has already looked at you on the executioner's table, taken the beating, and declared you completely "Not Guilty.

Your challenge today is to drop the exhausting act of self-justification - stop punishing yourself with guilt and trying to prove your worth, and simply receive His free gift of grace. Allow this truth to melt your pride, silence your digital anxieties, and shift your perspective into a state of permanent, deep-seated gratitude.

#3 Resurrection Power Fuels Your Transformation

It is easy to stop the story at the funeral of the King, but Paul pushes you further. He says the power available to you right now is the *"incomparably great power... according to the working of his mighty strength that he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead."*

This is the bedrock of the Methodist doctrine of sanctifying grace. You do not serve a dead King who merely left you an inheritance; you serve a living King whose resurrection life is an active, transforming energy within you. John Wesley deeply believed in Christian perfection - not that you become a flawless robot, but that your heart becomes so completely pure and filled with love for God and neighbor that sin loses its habitual power over you.

The modern world tells you that you are nothing more than the sum of your biology, your trauma, and your environment. You are told, "This is just who I am," or "I will always have this temper," or "My family has always struggled with this addiction, so I'm stuck with it." Culture tells you to manage your brokenness, medicate your symptoms, and accept your limitations.

The Gospel completely rejects this defeatist mindset. Paul declares that the most powerful force in cosmic history - resurrection power - is actively at work *within you*. This means you do not have to live as a slave to your past. If you are struggling with bitterness toward a family member as you prepare to sit around the Thanksgiving table, you have been given the supernatural power to forgive. If you are trapped in a secret habit or a cycle of paralyzing anxiety, the tomb is empty, the stone is rolled away, and you are not confined to a spiritual grave. Sanctification means that through the power of Christ, real, lasting change is possible today.

#4 Living as the Fully Alive Body of our King

Finally, Paul takes you to the highest peaks of Heavenly theology. Christ is seated at the right hand of God, *"far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked."*

Jesus is completely sovereign –

- Jesus has absolute authority. He is the reigning king that has the final say over the law. In our story, the king was sovereign - he had the absolute right to set the law, pass the sentence, or step down from his throne to take the lashes himself.
- Jesus is completely stable. He is not panicking over the socio-political climate of 2026 or the hidden chaos in your household. Because Christ is the sovereign King seated at the right hand of God, He is *"far above all rule and authority, power and dominion."* This means He is not stressed, surprised, or threatened by political shifts, cultural decay, or global instability.
- The Holy Spirit is your personal security. God's sovereignty means your life is not governed by random chance, blind luck, or the whims of a chaotic world. You are under the protection of a King who has already conquered sin and death.

Because He is the Heavenly King, the Church is defined as *"his body, the fullness of him."* In Wesleyan theology, this coordinates with Christian perfection or entire sanctification. This is not the claim that a human being becomes infallible or incapable of making mistakes; rather, it is the maturity of love. It is a heart so entirely captivated by the love of God that it naturally flows outward in love for one's neighbor. The church functions as the literal extension of the King's reign in the present age.

We live in a culture that is deeply obsessed with raw power, institutional control, and winning through dominance. Whether in politics, business, or online discourse, the goal is always to defeat the opposition, protect your own interests, and climb to the top of the social ladder.

But as Global Methodists, you belong to a completely different Kingdom. The story of the King reveals that true divine power does not look like a tyrant wielding a sword; it looks like a King taking a beating on behalf of his sinful subjects. Jesus wins by surrendering; He rules by serving.

Therefore, when you step out into your community during Thanksgiving week, you are called to subvert the world's definition of power. You do not show the world Christ by winning political arguments or hoarding resources. You show them Christ when you use your time, your money, and your talents to shield the vulnerable, welcome the lonely, and serve the marginalized. When you choose to love sacrificially in a world driven by self-preservation, you show the world that King Jesus is on the throne, and love has already won.

As you step out into Thanksgiving week, you are called to subvert the world's definition of power. Love wins when you use your time, your voice, and your resources. Invite a lonely neighbor or a single parent to join you for your Thanksgiving gathering. Initiate an act of kindness or a word of gratitude toward someone who has wronged you – extending grace to them even before they ask for it. Serve with a local food pantry or our care network with the intention of staying committed far into the winter months. Invest your

time into community programs like adult literacy, financial mentoring, or job-skills workshops. Donate winter coats or blankets for those who need protection. Back Roads Church - We are His body; we must live worthy of the grace He shows to us, the lashes He took for us, and the life He gave for you and for me. Be the hands and the feet this week. Happy Thanksgiving.

Let's pray

Heavenly Father, thank You for being both perfectly just and perfectly loving. Thank You for sending Jesus to take our lashes so that we could go free. Fill your congregation with resurrection power this week and open the eyes of our heart to live in radical victory and profound thanksgiving. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Next 3 Steps for the Congregation

To put this message into immediate action during Thanksgiving week, commit to these three steps:

1. **Keep a Daily Grace Ledger:** Every evening this week, write down three specific ways you witnessed God's *prevenient or sanctifying grace* operating in your day, intentionally shifting your focus away from holiday consumerism and anchoring your gratitude in His spiritual riches.
2. **Execute an Act of Sovereign Mercy:** Embody the sacrificial rule of King Jesus by identifying someone in your neighborhood, school, or workplace who is overlooked, lonely, or difficult to love. Intentionally bless them with an anonymous gift, a hot meal, or an act of service before Thanksgiving Day.
3. **Pray for Enlightened Vision:** Dedicate the first five minutes of your morning this week to reading Ephesians 1:17-19 on your knees, explicitly asking the Holy Spirit to clear away your anxieties and open the eyes of your heart to the resurrection power available to you today.