

The Life of David

Week 17: David's Swan Song

2 Samuel 23

Dr. Matt Cassidy ---- December 17, 2023

Hey, in today's passage we're going to look David's swan song. In 2 Samuel 23 the very first verse says, "These are the last words of David." "Swan song" is a figure of speech based on a legend that when a swan is soon to die, he will muster up enough strength to give his best and most beautiful song. And so today we're going to look at that figure of speech in David's life.

This is not his deathbed last words. When that happens a lot of times people are just fatigued or tired or delusional. But this is the premeditated "I want you to know this about me" speech. This is what he wants people to read at his funeral, his swan song.

A famous one that you might know about is General Douglas MacArthur when he was giving his last speech to Congress. He said the old motto "Old soldiers never die, they just fade away. And this old soldier is ending his military career and fading away. This old soldier just tried to do his duty that God had given him the light to see. Goodbye."

It's arguable that Jesus' swan song was when he prayed the high priestly prayer in John 17 for his disciples and for you and me. It's His last words that might have been premeditated.

Paul's swan song is 2 Timothy 4 where he says, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."

Another great swan song that you might know about is found in the Old Testament. It's all of chapter 24 of Joshua. But you know the verse "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

This is David's swan song. This is what he wants you and I to remember him by. And we're supposed to listen and to take note. We're supposed to learn from him about how to be remembered.

How do you want to be remembered by your friends and family, your grandchildren and great-grandchildren? What was the life of Sweetie and Dude? That's our grandparent names. How did they live?

We're supposed to listen and take note, because this isn't just anyone. This is King David. He was the man who changed all of human history, and he knew it when it was happening. In the beginning of 1 Samuel, Israel is hiding in the shadows of 6,000 square miles of land. And when David is ruling, he will finish and have a fortified boundary of over 60,000 square miles. He will have a unified nation with a central capital of Jerusalem, virtually undefeated in war and respected and feared by surrounding countries. These are King David's last words. It's seven sentences in chapter 23. It's a poem. There are three points to it in couplets. The three points that he wants us to remember about his life is that all glory goes to God. God got to use him as a king. And then we'll spend most of our time on the focus of David's hope, the object of David's faith.

1. All Glory Goes to God Almighty

Here's David's swan song, part one. To God be the glory. All glory goes to God Almighty, the sovereign God of the universe.

2 Samuel 23:1

These are the last words of David: “The inspired utterance of David son of Jesse, the utterance of the man exalted by the Most High, the man anointed by the God of Jacob, the hero of Israel’s songs: ² The Spirit of the Lord spoke through me; His word was on my tongue.”

Look what he says in those first two verses: “These are the last words of David: ‘The inspired utterance of David son of Jesse, the utterance of the man exalted by the Most High, the man anointed by the God of Jacob, the hero of Israel’s songs: The Spirit of the Lord spoke through me; His word was on my tongue.’”

The first thing he wants us to know is that he knows he has a rag-to-riches story. He was the son of Jesse from a backwater little village called Bethlehem. He knows he's the eighth son who was forgotten by his own father. And then he rises to the place where he is the hero of Israel's song. And how did you succeed, David? He tells us. He said he was exalted by the Most High and anointed by the God of Jacob. None of this *I pulled myself up by my bootstraps.* It was

dedication. It was hard work. He understood how God had sovereignly placed him in such a place at such a time to do such works. He blames God for every bit of his success.

And then he starts listing the things he's proud of. And the first thing he lists is that he's a worshipper. He says "His word on my tongue." David's proudest achievement is that he's a psalmist. And the way we can translate that into our lives is that he loved bragging about God: God's word on my tongue. He loved to tell stories about God; how God was working in Israel and how God was working in his own life.

And when we do that, we should be known for that so that our friends and family, our great-grandchildren know. He just went on and on, always talking about what God was doing in his life. Their faith wasn't just going to church and going through the motions. And worship or praise for you and me isn't supposed to be just singing songs; it's about bringing God into all our conversations about what He's doing—telling God stories.

I hope that you when you hear from your children and friends "Could you just let it go? Could you quit talking? I know, I've heard this story about how God got you this house or made you well or this reversal of fortune. Just let it go."

And you say, "Let it go?"

I was reminded this week of this old Quaker hymn. I love this Quaker hymn. It goes like this. You might have heard it.

No storm can shake my inmost calm
While to that refuge clinging;
Since Christ is Lord of heaven and earth,
How can I keep from singing?

Enya has an album where she sings this song. I love this song. "How can I keep from singing?"

David wants you to know that he loves to worship God and tell people about his glory. The second thing he wants you to know about his life is that he served as a prophet. He said, "The Spirit of the Lord spoke through me."

When David was writing these hymns, the psalms that become the Book of Psalms, he knew he was writing Holy Writ. He loved God's revelation and he was blessed to be part of that.

He knew that psalms were part of God’s plan for you and I to know that nature of God and the promises that he’s made.

Jesus uses the Psalms as evidence. Jesus says from the beginning, from Moses and the prophets and the Psalms, “God spoke to them concerning the Messiah”—*concerning me*, Jesus is saying. David loves God’s revelation.

You know, when we have funerals or memorial services around here, we will set out memorabilia in the lobby so that people can look at some little piece of something in the person’s life that defines them—a hobby or value. I love it when an old saint has his or her Bible laid out and the leather is worn through from their hand oil and notes are written all over the margins. It’s a wrinkled mess. This is a well-worn Bible.

That’s what David is saying here. *I want people to know I loved His revelation. I enjoyed telling people stories about Him.* David says, I want my life to scream “To God be the glory.” *Because it wasn’t about me and attributes; it was about what God did with what little I had.*

All of God’s “giants” have been weak men who did great things for God because they reckoned on God being with them.

--- Hudson Taylor

This value reminds me of Hudson Taylor. He was a famous missionary to China. He wrote this: “All of God’s ‘giants’ have been weak men who did great things for God because they reckoned on God being with them.” They counted on God being with them.

You and me, men and women who are weak, believing in the Christmas hymn “Emmanuel, God with us,” are able to do great things because we absolutely believe that God is with us. That’s what David is doing here.

The first point of his eulogy that he wants someone to read at his funeral is that—I get it—he understood that he was gifted by God athletically. You can’t argue with that. And even his intellect, his military insight and his wisdom in writing psalms. But he would say, *Look, I just played my part. It was the sovereign Lord. God had a plan and a way to make the plan happen. It was the sovereign God Almighty who placed me here at this time to do His works.*

David is blessing God with a sense of destiny about his life. We should all have a sense of destiny about us like David is showing here. Right here, right now, for the very purpose of doing great works that God has arranged before time. David says, *Don't put me on a pedestal. I just played my part. That's all. I just played my part. To God be the glory.*

2. How David Was Used by God as a King

The second stanza that he's going to emphasize for us is that the part he played was being used by God to be a king. He was used by God to be a righteous king.

2 Samuel 23:3-4

**The God of Israel spoke, the Rock of Israel said to me:
“When one rules over people in righteousness, when he rules in
the fear of God, ⁴ he is like the light of morning at sunrise on a
cloudless morning, like the brightness after rain that brings grass
from the earth.”**

And the couplet says this: “The God of Israel spoke, the Rock of Israel said to me: ‘When one rules over people in righteousness, when he rules in the fear of God, he is like a light of morning at sunrise on a cloudless morning, like the brightness after rain that brings grass from the earth.’”

God, the God who is the Rock of Israel, used me, and I tried to rule like the future righteous king. In Hebrew, that's *tzadik*. And the righteous one is also the just one. And David ruled with justice. He was a just ruler. And that means that he was impartial. He had an impartial standard. He was no respecter of people. He didn't have a hierarchy. He showed this in the way he treated widows and orphans, those who are needy, in the same way he would treat royalty. David could not be bought. There's someone I'd vote for, right?

King Solomon shows that he ruled like a just king in his first expression of his wisdom. If you know the story, do you remember? What is the issue before the king of all Israel? Two prostitutes arguing over the life of a child. And he even wants to bring justice to them. He's not above that, because he's just. He's not partial.

A righteous king rules with justice. And where does David say he gets the courage to do that? Where does he get the insight to know what justice? The passage says it. It says, “I ruled in the fear of God.” You can’t have justice, you can’t have government, you can’t have peace on earth, unless God reveals what the rules are. You have to have laws from outside of creation, outside of 51 percent of people voting for something in order to have justice. In other words, nature and reason can only take us so far when it comes to ethics, because there’s no conscience in nature. Actually, the law of nature is survival of the fittest.

When I was a child growing up, we watched a show on the laws of nature. It was called *The Wild Kingdom*. They don’t allow us to watch those anymore.

It’s interesting that the oldest university in America is Harvard University (Harvard College at the time). It started in 1636. And its crest, its motto, has three books on it. And the original motto is “Veritas: truth for the church and for Christ.” And the top two books were face up—the Old and the New Testament. And the bottom book was face down. And it was to show that reason has its limits, but revelation is from God, from above, from outside of man’s reason. It’s above that.

Look at the chronological history of Israel itself. They get out of Egypt, they’re forming themselves as a nation—my people, my nation—and God doesn’t send them straight to Canaan. He stops at Mount Sinai to get a constitution, to get a law. And when Moses goes up, he doesn’t write those out himself; he receives those from God above, from heaven, outside of earth. God Almighty brings them. It’s from outside. It’s a standard not to be argued or debated.

Because here’s the thing. The arrogant pride of every human soul, the definition of pride in every human soul is *Says who? Says me. I’m going to run my life my way, my family my way, my country the way I want to. Says who.*

And Mount Sinai says, *God. Thus saith the Lord. He’s not one of you. He’s outside. He’s telling you the way things are right and real and true.*

Here’s an interesting insight. It’s not mine—it’s from a scholar I studied under. This is deeply psycho-theological. Here we go. Have you ever wondered why Jews and the history of Judaism is the history of the persecution of Jews? Here’s why. Here’s the main reason why. Throughout all history and now, a significant reason is this: because those Jews brought a law from heaven, from God Almighty, to tell us the way we ought to live, giving us an absolute standard and accountability, an outside source of justice.

Every diabolical and evil act that the Nazis did was all legal. You know that, right? The leaders, the shot callers in leadership in the Nazi party all grew up with a classical education, studying Aristotle, natural law. And then they all got advanced degrees in law. They passed the law, made it legal, and then did evil. Read the transcript of the Nuremberg trials. You'll see that. It's in a movie, an Academy award-winning movie called *Judgment at Nuremberg*. They said, *It's reasonable, and 51 percent of us voted on it*. And that's the limitations.

The point is that every proud man, every proud woman, in a place of power, who does not want to be accountable and does not want to be held to an absolute ethic, one of the first things they think is *What are we going to do about those Jews and that law from God?* And that's how it all starts.

And David says, "I ruled like the future righteous king because I feared God and I knew His covenant and I knew His laws." And the picture he's trying to paint here is what it looks like when we live under a righteous and a just ruler. It's Camelot. The meaning is Camelot.

Let me read it again. You'll see it. "When one rules over people as the righteous one, when he rules in the fear of God, he is like the light of morning at sunrise on a cloudless morning, like the brightness after rain that brings grass from the earth."

I think the legend of King Arthur (not the historic King Arthur) and the legend of Camelot—if you know that folklore, you know that when King Arthur, when his soul was right and he was ruling like the righteous king, literally, the land broke forth in prosperity. The fields were bountiful, the cows had twins. I mean, it was everywhere all the time. And then when King Arthur's soul became ill and he ruled in sickness, the land became a barren wasteland. There was drought and there was famine.

And maybe David's story is the picture that this legend is built upon. That is, when we have leadership or a king who rules like the righteous one in the fear of God, everybody wins. Everybody is pleased. David in his swan song is saying, "Glory to God in the life that he gave me, in the role I got to play as an image of a future of a righteous king who will rule the world."

3. David's Ultimate Hope

And then his last point of emphasis here is about David's ultimate hope. The third stanza is going to be focused on the center of the Davidic covenant, the promise that God made, particularly to David, but also to all of us; where God swears by His own name, and he's

appealing to the nature of God to be a promise keeper. This is the point of David's hope. This is the meaning of David's faith. We'll spend some time here.

2 Samuel 23:5

“If my house were not right with God, surely He would not have made with me an everlasting covenant, arranged and secured in every part; surely He would not bring to fruition my salvation and grant me my every desire.”

Look what it says in verse 5: “If my house were not right with God, surely he would not have made with me an everlasting covenant, arranged and secured in every part; surely He would not bring to fruition my salvation and grant me my every desire.”

This is the laser focus of David's faith in God. It is in the promise of God and the nature of God to fulfill His promise. Look at the words of certainty in just this one sentence about the promises of God. He says, “... an everlasting covenant, secured in every part.” And then look how he's appealing to the nature of God as a promise keeper where he says “... He's going to bring to fruition my salvation and every desire.” The trust that he has, the hope that he has, is in his relationship with God based on the nature of God.

2 Samuel 23:6-7

“But evil men are all to be cast aside like thorns, which are not gathered with the hand. ⁷ Whoever touches thorns uses a tool of iron or the shaft of a spear; they are burned up where they lie.”

And part of his definition of salvation (actually, a biblical definition) is that justice is going to be reconciled. There's a reconciliation at the end. And the section ends with verses 6 and 7: “But evil men are all to be cast aside like thorns, which are not gathered with the hand.” He's going to use military tools to gather these thorns. “Whoever touches thorns uses a tool of iron or the shaft of a spear; they are burned up where they lie.”

So, David is connecting salvation together with justice, just like it is in the Bible. And David knows that in this lifetime justice can't ultimately prevail, not with the hands of men. So, he's appealing to that future date.

The outline of the Book of Revelation is this, generally speaking. The righteous king will rule with justice, so the first major part of Revelation is how absolute justice is brought when the return of the King happens. And then the latter part of the Book of Revelation is when He's gifting out the grace of salvation to those who have believed in Him.

So, David is doing the same thing but in reverse order. *He's given me salvation, and salvation includes this ultimate reconciliation with those who were thwarting me.*

This is David's legacy. This is what we want to be our legacy. Let me review. All glory is given to God for what has been going on in his life. And David was able to lead like the righteous king because he served in the fear of God. And then, he is blessed and he is saved by the covenant that God has made with him. Selah. That's what he wants to be read and spoken about at his funeral. That's what he wants you to remember him by. *Thanks for coming ... have some cookies on the way out.*

Maybe it's just me, but if I'm at the funeral and these are the three points, at least when I get in my car I'll say—I have a little dignity ... never speak ill of the dead—but I think I would turn to Melinda and say, “He's the one who stole another man's wife and then when it was found out that she was pregnant, didn't he force her husband into an ambush with his platoon, probably killing most or all of them? We're not going to talk about that?” Anyone else? Maybe it's just me, I don't know.

And here's the point. This is David's laser dot focus on his faith: the promise of God and the nature of God to fulfill the promise.

Let me put it another way. We say this around here. The most important thing about you is what you think about God. This is a very close second: what you think God thinks about you. Let me say it together. What you think about God is the most important thing about you. What you think God thinks about you is right after that.

God's View of David

This section of these seven verses is what God thinks about David. That's not bringing up that conversation I'm having in the car on the way home.

I think I might have told you previously that I took a class on David this past summer and read a lot of books and listened to a lot of lectures. The big idea for the whole semester that the professor stated almost every time is that there is one truth that we can know for certain: that

God loved David and David knew it; that David was absolutely confident and convinced that God loved him, because God did love him. This is God's view of David. The most important thing about David was his view of God, and right after that was God's view of David.

This is God's view of David. And I'll prove it. Look at every single time David is mentioned after his death in the Bible. Seventeen times in the kingdom period when a new king is about to take the throne, some prophet says, *Just do this one thing*. Seventeen times it says this: **“If you walk in my ways and you keep my statutes and commands like David did, you'll be blessed.”** That's what God thinks about David.

In Nehemiah two times he is called by God “David, a man of God.”

Eight times in the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel he is called “David, my servant.”

And then in the New Testament—this is where we get the quote, his nickname—“I have found David, my son, who is a man after my own heart.”

What you think about God is the most important thing about you. What you think God thinks about you is next.

Application: Do You Believe in God's Covenant with You?

This is God's view of David, God's view of His covenant with David. This is David's salvation. Is this how you think God thinks about you? Is this how you think God thinks about His covenant with you? Because this is the laser dot focus of David: the promises of God and the nature of God.

So, why does David think this? How can David have this kind of confidence, this level of certainty? Why is he so convinced of God's love for him? If we can answer that question, maybe we can find that that's where we should point our faith.

We find the answer to David's rock-solid faith in the Rock of Israel by looking at 2 Samuel 22. Chapters 22 and 23 are supposed to be together, and it's called “The Song of David.” In 2 Samuel 22, “The Song of David” is a unique chapter in the Bible in that it's the only time you're going to see an entire chapter copied and pasted into another section. The entire chapter becomes Psalm 18. And the reason this unique expression of the revelation of God is spoken two times—fifty-one verses—is because of the powerful lesson that we can all learn here—so we can learn about the certainty we can have about the nature of God and His promises and His nature to keep those promises.

2 Samuel 22:47-50

“The Lord lives! Praise be to my Rock! Exalted be my God, the Rock, my Savior!

⁴⁸ He is the God who avenges me, who puts the nations under me, ⁴⁹ who sets me free from my enemies.

You exalted me above my foes; from a violent man you rescued me.

⁵⁰ Therefore I will praise You, Lord, among the nations; I will sing the praises of Your name.

⁵¹ He gives His king great victories; He shows unfailing kindness to His anointed, to David and his descendants forever.”

Because David early on in the psalm (we won't be able to read the whole section) says, *Look, he took me from a shepherd to the mighty men of all nations.* Here's how the last paragraph goes. This is where David is getting his confidence. “The Lord lives! Praise be to my Rock! Exalted be my God, the Rock, my Savior. He is the God who avenges me, who puts nations underneath me, who sets me free from my enemies. You exalted me above my foes; from a violent man you rescued me. Therefore I will praise You, Jehovah, among the nations; I will sing the praises of Your name.”

Here's why. Here's the last sentence of this psalm: “He gives His king great victories; He shows unfailing kindness to His anointed, to David and his descendants forever.”

“Unfailing kindness to David and his descendants forever”—his descendants are you and me. If you are a Christ follower and you believe in Jesus Christ and what He did on the cross and how He was raised according to His promise, that's us. “Unfailing kindness”—he's putting everything down on the promise of God and His unfailing kindness.

Did you know there's a Hebrew word for unfailing kindness? Anybody want to guess what that word is? Yeah, you're right—it's *hesed*. It usually means lovingkindness. But let's just do a survey of our Christmas sermons on *hesed*.

We learned the first week that it's loyal devotion that's not deserved, as from the mighty men. It's covenant grace when that grace is not merited. It is dependable. We're living for this

mercy when that mercy is unjustified. And now it's unfailing kindness. I would say it's infallible kindness.

Here's what David is doing. He's going to Vegas. He is all in. He's betting his soul, he's betting his eternal destiny on this: the *hesed* of God, the unfailing, the infallible kindness of God; that God can't renege on a promise He makes, because of His covenant love, His covenant nature, His unfailing love.

We keep talking about *hesed* because the Christmas story is proof of the *hesed* of God. It is experiential, historical evidence that God is unable to renege on a promise. It is against His nature. He makes a promise of salvation, He makes a covenant of salvation, and He is obliged by His own nature. Even the relationship between the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit shows Jesus' loyal devotion, like the mighty men, to the Father, that He's willing to submit to the Father's will to become a man, a baby in a manger. It is faithful mercy of Jesus to take the justice that we deserve and receive the wrath of God. *Hesed* is faithful mercy when it's unjustified.

It's this covenant grace that is a gift. It talks about the nature of the office of Jesus, that He is now serving as our high priest. We pray prayers, we offer sacrifices. He takes those envelopes of requests, let's just say, to God the Father. And who are we to bring a request to that throne room? He puts His wax seal on it and says, *This is from me. They're with me.* That's His covenant grace. *My seal is on their prayer requests.*

So, this Christmas is all about an understanding of the depth of the *hesed* nature of God. What we believe about God is the most important thing about us. But what we believe God believes about us is right behind; that God is a promise maker and He's a promise keeper. And when He looks at us, He looks at us in the same way He looked to David. And He says, "You're mine."

So, what words do you have rolling around in your head? What voices are speaking to you? Is it this? Is it the truth of the Word of God revealed to us in both nature and in this specific revelation? This is the nature of Jehovah, the Rock. And these are the promises of salvation.

Here's my last invitation. For some of you, this Christmas, maybe you've never put your absolute, complete faith in your faith alone—everything—this laser dot focus—faith only—not by works. In grace only—what grace? A gift (grace means gift)—a gift only. That's it. What gift? In Jesus only. There are no works. It's only a gift, and the gift is Jesus. And what gift is Jesus? That He came and lived a life we couldn't live, so that He could die a death He didn't

deserve, so that we might inherit the gift of His righteousness. And that sounds too good to believe. And so, there's a resurrection that proved that it happened. All bets down, hands off the table. Put your soul on that—only on that. If you've never done that, how about today? And become as a gift of God a member of His family. You'll spend eternity with Him.

And for many of us, we might have heard this all before. But how about this season we start to grasp that our faith is not in anything that we do or have done or what we think we are in gifts and talents. It is all about God. We're bragging about Him all the time. Our life is nothing more than a God story. And the life we get to live here is a sense of destiny. I could live anytime, but I live now. I could live anywhere, but I live here. And why? To do the will of God, the good works that He has arranged before the beginning of time to do in Christ Jesus, so that I can show other people what it looks like to have a single focus on the nature and the promises of God. To God be the glory. I'm going to live that way, with great confidence and certainty, the way that David lived his life.

So, let's pray to that end. Let's make a commitment for the first time, or renew an old covenant with God together.

Lord, I'd ask that You would help us accept this Christmas gift anew, maybe for the first time. Many people have walked in here thinking, "I've got to go to mass. I've got to go to church. I've got to do things so that You'll like me. And now I see, week after week, that it's all You showing up with Your hesed and giving us promises of grace, forgiveness, mercy, because it is Your nature." And it is also Your nature not just to promise those things, but to fulfill those promises. We put our faith in those gifts, those promises. We put our faith in Your nature.

And now we live with confidence that You will never leave us or forsake us. Your Spirit swears to that. We've based our hope in the hesed of the Spirit never leaving us. Emmanuel, God with us, just broken people doing what's next for Your glory.

Lord, I'd ask that You would help us understand the fullness of this Christmas experience of who You are and what You're like and what You've done in our lives, so that we will worship You together, not just in song, but in stories; that we would brag about You to all the world. You are a great and mighty God, the Rock of salvation, the giver of the Law, the forgiver of sins. We celebrate that today. We pray this in Jesus' name. And all God's people said, Amen.