

David: A Man After God's Own Heart

Lesson 12: The Sweet Psalmist and the Son of David -- 2 Samuel 23:1–5; Psalm 23; Acts 13:22–23

Near the end of a long life, the old king gathered his strength to leave a few last words, and Scripture preserves them for us as “the last words of David.” It is a fitting title for a man whose first appearance was a boy called in from the sheep, and whose whole life had been set to music. He calls himself, in this final song, “the sweet psalmist of Israel,” and the name fits. Through every season, the pasture and the palace, the cave and the throne, the triumph and the tragedy, David had turned his life into songs, and those songs have been sung by the people of God ever since. The shepherd boy became the worship leader of the world.

And what songs they are. None more beloved than the twenty-third psalm, six short verses that have walked with more grieving, frightened, and weary people than perhaps any other words ever written. “The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.” The man who had kept sheep on the Bethlehem hills knew exactly what he was saying. He had led flocks to still water and green grass; he had carried lambs through dark ravines; he had fought off the lion and the bear. And he turns it all around and says: this is what God is to me. The shepherd has become the sheep, and he has found his Shepherd to be everything. Green pastures and still waters. A restored soul. A guiding hand through the valley of the shadow of death. A table spread in the presence of enemies. Goodness and mercy following him all the days of his life, and a home in the house of the LORD forever.

In his last words David also looks back on the great promise, the covenant God had made with his house, and he rests his whole hope on it: God “has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and secure.” David’s own house was far from perfect, as this study has painfully seen. But the covenant did not rest on David’s perfection; it rested on God’s faithfulness, and so it would surely come to pass. The dying king looked down the long corridor of the centuries and trusted that God would keep His word, that out of his line would come the King whose throne would never end.

And He did. Generations later, in the synagogue at Antioch, the apostle Paul stood up and told the rest of the story: “Of this man’s offspring God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, as he promised.” The sweet psalmist of Israel was the ancestor of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep, the King now reigning on David’s everlasting throne. This is where the whole study has been heading all along. We have followed a shepherd who became a king, a sinner who was forgiven, a worshiper who gave us songs to sing, and at every turn his life has been pointing past himself to a greater Shepherd, a greater King, a greater Son. In this final lesson we gather it all up, and we lift our eyes from David to David’s Lord.

Group Discussion: This study has followed David through every season of his life, his faith and his failures, his worship and his sin. As we come to his last words and to the New Testament's declaration that Jesus is the promised Son of David, what threads from David's whole story do you see pointing beyond him to Christ? How has watching David's life enlarged your view of the Savior who came from his line?

Personal Reflection: Look back over this entire study of David's life. Where has God most deeply touched your own heart, in the call of the overlooked shepherd, the battle that belonged to the Lord, the wilderness years, the great fall and the clean heart, or the everlasting throne? What is God asking you to carry forward from David's story into the rest of your walk with Christ?

Read 2 Samuel 23:1–5; Psalm 23; Acts 13:22–23

Study Questions

1. In his last words, David calls himself “the sweet psalmist of Israel” and speaks of the Spirit of the LORD speaking by him (23:1–2). What does it teach us about David's life and legacy that, through every season, he turned his experience into worship, and what does this reveal about the place of worship and Scripture-shaped song in the life of God's people?
2. David made a lifelong habit of turning his joys, fears, failures, and deliverances into worship offered back to God. As you look at your own life, are you learning to bring the whole of your experience, the good and the hard, to God in worship? What would it look like to make worship the running response of your life, as David did?
3. Psalm 23 opens, “The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want” (23:1). Drawing on his own years as a shepherd, what is David teaching us about who God is and how He cares for His people, and why is it significant that the shepherd-king presents himself here simply as a dependent sheep?
4. David, a powerful king, was content to call himself a sheep and to depend entirely on his Shepherd. Where do you struggle to live as a dependent sheep, trusting God to provide, lead, and protect, rather than relying on your own strength and control? Where do you most need to say, and mean, “I shall not want”?
5. Psalm 23 promises God's presence even in “the valley of the shadow of death” and a table prepared “in the presence of my enemies” (23:4–5). What does this teach us about the kind of care God gives, that He does not always remove the dark valley or the enemies, but is present with us in the midst of them?
6. There are valleys and enemies in every life that God does not simply remove. Where do you most need to know the Shepherd's presence with you right now, in some valley or in the presence of some enemy? How does the promise that He is with you, rather than that He will spare you every hardship, change the way you face it?
7. David rests his final hope not on his own record but on God's covenant: “he has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and secure” (23:5). Given all this study has shown of David's failures, why is it significant that he grounds his hope in God's faithfulness?

rather than his own, and what does this teach us about where our own assurance must finally rest?

8. At the end of your life, what will you be resting your hope on? Be honest about whether you are quietly leaning on your own record, your good deeds, or your religious performance. What would it mean to rest your final hope, as David did, wholly on God's covenant faithfulness, now fulfilled for us in Christ?
9. Paul declares in the synagogue, "Of this man's offspring God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, as he promised" (Acts 13:22–23), identifying Jesus as the promised Son of David. Bringing together what we have seen, the anointed shepherd, the everlasting throne, and the shepherd's heart of Psalm 23, how does David's whole life point forward to Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep, and the King now reigning? How should the certainty that Jesus is this promised Savior shape the way we live?
10. Look back across this whole study of David's life, from the pasture to the last words. Name one specific way you sense Jesus, the Son of David, forming you through all you have seen. What is the single most important truth from David's story that you want to carry with you for the rest of your walk with the Lord?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: John 10:11–18, Jesus the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep; Luke 1:31–33, the angel's promise that Jesus would receive the throne of David and reign forever; Acts 2:29–36, the risen Christ enthroned at God's right hand as Lord and Christ; Revelation 22:16, Jesus as "the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star"; Hebrews 13:20–21, the great Shepherd of the sheep equipping us to do God's will; Psalm 22, the suffering of the Shepherd-King foreshadowing the cross of Christ