

# Deuteronomy 4:9-40

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Preacher: Stuart Cashman

[ 0 : 00 ] What do you think is the biggest danger for us as Christians, those of us who have trusted in Christ?! What's the biggest danger to us making progress in joy and in faith in living for Jesus?

! Is it the secular society around us? Is it the rise of Islam? I know many fear of that, particularly with immigration as well as with the troubles in the Middle East.

Is it the temptations that daily assail us in a permissive culture? Well, I think if you ask Moses what the biggest danger is, or indeed ask the Lord God himself, he wouldn't say it's any one of those things.

But I think the biggest danger is the danger that faced the Israelites as Moses spoke to them here in Deuteronomy chapter 4. It's the danger we all face. Look at verse 9. What's the things he's exhorting them to do?

Only take care and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life.

[ 1 : 08 ] See, the danger for them is they would forget the reality of God's dealings with them.

Forget the reality of his revelation on Mount Horeb, where he spoke to them. Forget the reality of what he'd done for them.

And isn't that the danger for us? While we know things in our heads, they slip from our hearts, depart from our hearts, as Moses warns here. We can forget the reality of God in that moment of crisis, when we suddenly find we've lost our job, or suddenly we get the bad diagnosis from the doctor.

We can forget the reality of God's work and truth in the face of the world's lies. In the face of a lie that the only real knowledge is scientific knowledge, and everything else is just make-believe.

We can forget the reality of God and his word and his work in us. Just in the humdrum routine of daily life, just getting up, going to work, looking after the kids, sitting alone in our home for those who live on their own.

All those things, we can forget the reality of who God is and what he's done, can't we? Isn't that our greatest danger? Isn't that why the Lord Jesus gave us the bread and the wine that we'll eat later on, and said, do this in remembrance of me?

[ 2 : 22 ] Because we so easily forget. Because when we talk about remembering, especially in the Bible, we're not just talking about getting exam questions right, remembering our doctrine so we can tick the box.

We're talking about remembering in our hearts. When my wife says to me, not that she ever says this, but when the implication is, have you remembered our wedding anniversary?

She isn't looking for an answer, 10th of April. Well, she's looking for a, have you acted on that fact? Have you planned? Have you got a babysitter? Have you booked a table? Have you done things? Is that truth in your heart to come out in your life?

That's what remembering is in the Bible. It's not just mental. That's why Moses says, doesn't he, verse 9, lest you forget the things you've seen, lest they depart from your heart, from the centre of your emotions, from the control centre of our lives.

It's not enough just to know it in our heads. It should shake our lives as well. So what is it, Moses is concerned that the Israelites do not forget? What do we need to not forget?

[ 3 : 26 ] In this world where we're so obsessed with the material, the visible, the tangible, the touchable, what must we not forget? Well, Moses reminds us of three things which we could spend weeks and weeks on, but we're going to roll through them as quickly as we can.

Firstly, verses 9 to 14, you must never forget the reality of God's glorious revelation. His glorious revelation. Secondly, 15 to 31, His incomparable character.

His incomparable character. And thirdly, His unrivaled authority. Verses 32 to 40. So let's have a look at, first of all, the glorious reality of His revelation.

Well, the reality of His glorious revelation. Verse 10. Take care, lest you forget these things. How, verse 10, on the day that you stood before the Lord your God at Horeb.

It's another name from Mount Sinai. The Lord said to me, Gather the people to me, that I may let them hear my words, so that they may learn to fear me all the days that they live on earth, and that they may teach their children so.

[ 4 : 31 ] And you came near and stood at the foot of the mountain, while the mountain burned with fire to the heart of heaven, wrapped in darkness, cloud and gloom. Then, the Lord spoke to you out of the midst of the fire.

What did Moses say? Remember what you've seen? What did they see? End of verse 12. You heard the sound of words, But you saw no form.

There was only a voice. They saw all sorts of other things, didn't they? They saw the fire, the cloud, the darkness. If you read the full account of this in Exodus 19, they heard the thunder and the trumpet.

They felt the mountain shake. No doubt they could smell and taste the smoke and the fire around them on the mountain. It was a multi-sensory experience, wasn't it? It was something that was, in a sense, unforgettable.

What was the purpose of it? Well, do you see how it was the Lord's initiative. Verse 10. The Lord said to me, gather the people to me. This was God's majestic revelation of himself.

[ 5 : 40 ] It was his idea. It's not human beings trying to invent what God might be like. Or rather, God speaking, revealing himself in majesty. Do you see the purpose as well?

Verse 10. So that they may learn to fear me all the days they live on earth. Now that word fear is not terrifying. Hebrew has another word for terrifying.

The word fear is a reverent awe and respect and worship. This is God revealing himself in his majesty so we might relate to him properly. And not only us, but we may teach our children to do also.

See, this event had been 40 years earlier. All those who were adults at that time had died off because of their disobedience and lack of faith. Now, surely some of the people alive, as Moses speaks to them now, had been children in that day.

But it was 40 years earlier. And most of the people who were there hadn't been alive 40 years earlier. Or if they had been alive, they'd be too small. In my own family, 40 years ago, the thing that happened was my grandfather died.

[ 6 : 46 ] What do I remember of him? I was two years old at the time. If you're trying to do the maths, that makes me 42 now. Okay? Just take away that distraction. So what do I know about him? I only know what my parents, particularly my mother, has told me.

So for these children, as Moses speaks to them, they will only know what their parents were there, had told them. They have to pass it on. And so he passes on down to generations. So this majestic revelation was God's initiative.

The purpose was for right relationship, fear and worship of God. And you notice, it was sufficient revelation. But it was not exhaustive. The clouds, the fire, they were enough to impress on them the majesty, the otherness, the holiness of God.

It was sufficient. But it was not exhaustive. They didn't know everything about God. John Calvin in the 16th century puts it like this. The clouds, the smoke and flame, although they were symbols of heavenly glory, restrained the minds of all from attempting to penetrate too deeply.

This is a God whom we cannot master. We cannot contain. We cannot fathom everything about him. His revelation is majestic. He is incomparable. He is unknowable, except as he reveals himself to us.

[ 8 : 04 ] But you notice he wants to be known. It's his initiative. He speaks. He wants to be known. Now I guess we might sit here thinking, well, it's all very well for the Israelites.

They saw the fire. They were terrified by that's voice. But we don't have that. So how do we know God's majestic revelation? Well, we know it firstly because it's recorded.

The main thing here are the words. The words. We still have the word of God, don't we? For those eyewitnesses, wrote down and recorded for us as they were moved along by the Spirit. We have God's revelation to us here sitting in front of us in the Scriptures.

Most clearly we have the revelation of God. The majestic revelation in the Lord Jesus himself. The very word of God. The word that in the beginning had created everything.

The word they heard proclaimed from Horeb that day. Was the word that became flesh and dwelt among us. As we read in John's Gospel. We have seen his majesty, says John relaying that to us. [9:09] We have seen his glory. The glory of the one and only. We see that glory most clearly. In the cross and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. As we see God's holiness and love demonstrated to us.

Holiness. Sin cannot go unpunished. And love. That sin is punished in the person of the eternal Son of God. The word of God incarnate. As we read on through the New Testament.

We see. We have this revelation even more clearly. Yes we don't stand at the foot of a mountain. But as we gather together in worship. We gather in the presence of the living God.

To hear his word again. Here's how the writer to the Hebrews puts it. Hebrews chapter 12. You Christians. Talking to Hebrew believers. Who are thinking about giving up on their faith. And going back to Judaism.

Because it seemed more tangible to them. He says this. You do not come to what may be touched. A blazing fire. And darkness. And gloom. And trumpet. He's talking about.

[10:10] Forer. Exodus 19. Do you follow me for. You do not come to that. To the sound of a trumpet. And a voice. Whose words. May the hearers beg. That no further messages be spoken to them. But you have come.

As you come to worship today. To Mount Zion. To the city of the living God. The heavenly Jerusalem. And to God. The judge of all. And to the spirits of the righteous. Made perfect. And to Jesus. The mediator of a new covenant. And the sprinkled blood. That speaks a better word. Than the blood of Abel. You see. We've come to something better. We're not just sitting in this room.

But we're joined together. With God's people. In heaven. And around the world. Seeing his praises. Hearing his word. And with this greater privilege. Comes a greater warning.

The writer to the Hebrews. Finishes like this. See that you do not refuse. Him who is speaking. For if they did not escape. When they refused him. Who warned them on earth. As heaven touched earth.

[11:09] At Horeb. Much less will we escape. If we reject him. Who warns from heaven. This is God's majestic revelation. As his word is brought to us.

As the Lord Jesus. Speaks to us through his word. By his spirit. From on high. As he speaks to us. In the visible word. Of his sacrilege. As we come to there. So let's remember the reality.

Of his glorious revelation. Let's remember that reality. Then in verses 15 to 31. Moses goes on. And reminds them. Never to forget the reality.

Of the Lord's incomparable being. Or we could say. His incomparable covenant faithfulness. I've changed my mind. About how to try and teach this. Time and time again this week.

So I'll give you both. The possible headings. And you can choose. Which one you prefer. Now. And if you're doing the. The fact finding sheets. I can't even remember which one. It's got on there. But you can try and fill them in. As best you can. The key.

[12:05] The key. Factor. Going on the background here. Is the Lord's covenant. Look at verse 13. For example. Moses says. He declared to you. His covenant.

Then verse 23. What must they not do? Take care. Lest you forget. The covenant. Of the Lord your God. Or verse 31. We may forget. But the Lord your God.

Is a merciful God. He will not leave you. Or destroy you. Or forget the covenant. With your fathers. That he swore to them. See that's the backdrop here. The covenant. What is a covenant?

Well. Come along to the Sunday school class. And find out. Or briefly. It's a commitment. A commitment with conditions. And with blessings. And with blessings. And curses. And that's why they were not to forget.

That was the background. Here. God is faithful to that covenant. Because of his. Incomparable being. And I suppose the key issue is. How do they know this God.

[13:00] In their daily experience. How do they know this God. Through their daily experience. Well. Of all the other religions. Of the world at the time. The way you knew your God. As you had a. A model of him.

You could see. You could say. Well that's my God. There. Or at least. That represents my God. That's who we're worshipping. This is Baal. He looks like a bull. And he's got horns. And a spear.

And all that kind of stuff.

That's what our God is like. But for the Israelites. They. They didn't have. A physical image of God. Why not? Well it was important. Look at verse 15.

This was a temptation for them. To make some physical image. Verse 15. Therefore watch yourselves very carefully. Since you saw no form on the day that the Lord spoke to you at Horeb. Out of the midst of the fire. Beware. Lest you act corruptly. By making a carved image for yourselves. In the form of a figure. Of the likeness of male or female. Or anything else in creation. [13:54] See the temptation was to make some physical image. That they could point to. And say this is our God. But God is the creator. He is above all creation. He cannot be represented.

By something in creation. By something we make. That was part of their temptation. The other part of their temptation was to. Either to make an image.

Or to look for something else in creation. To worship. So look at verse 19. Beware. Lest you raise your eyes to heaven. And when you see the sun. And the moon. And the stars. And all the hosts of heaven.

You be drawn away. And bow down to them. And serve them. Things that the Lord your God. Has allotted to all the peoples. Under the whole of heaven. That's referring back to Genesis 1.

Where the Lord had put the sun. And the moon. And the stars. And the sky. To mark out the times. And the seasons. These were things allotted to all peoples. So they could know. The day. And the night.

[14:47] And when to plant their harvest. When to plant their crops. And when to harvest them. They were lost to all the peoples. But you. Says Moses. Are special people. Whom God has chosen. So you've got to.

Remember the reality. Of your God. And not try and reduce him. To something you can see. Or something he has made. As part of his. Good gifts to you in creation. Now that was the temptation for them.

Living in a world where. People wanted something to look at. Something to touch. And say that's my God. God. Or where people stood in awe. As something big and great. And said that's our God. Now we do not live.

In that same kind of world. Do we? That's probably not. Our temptation today. To try and. Make a model of God. God. But. As Calvin says.

Our very nature. We are perpetual idol factories. We're always. Trying to make something. To worship as God. God. God. The danger for us. Is not that we try and. Manufacture something.

[15:47] To look at. But that we forget. How God. Is really known. See in that. In the ancient Near East. You knew your God. Because you could point to. It was the sun. Or the stars. Or he was.

This statue. He made. The idea was. You could only know something. If it was. Visible. And tangible. Now that same idea. Is around today.

Isn't it? There are those. Who claim. The only true knowledge. Is scientific knowledge. Something's only true. If you can measure it. If you can put it in a test tube. Or a mass spectrometer.

Do some imaging on it. Or whatever. But the only true knowledge. Is scientific knowledge.

Therefore. You can't prove God. Therefore. God isn't real. You can't know him. It's just. Belief in God.

It's like belief in the tooth fairy. That's the idea. That is absolutely prevalent. In our society. Now what happens. When you. Get rid of a God. You.

[16:41] You end up worshipping. Something creative. Don't you? We are creatures. Made to worship. So if we try. And get rid of. The real God. We just end up worshipping. Something else. I was watching.

Good old Brian Cox. The Human Universe program. Last week. Or two weeks ago. And. The topic that day. Was. Who are we? And because.

He is a man. Who is made to worship. Like all of us. As he declared. That we are all just. Here. Because of. Mathematics. Because of the fundamental. Mathematical laws.

Behind the universe. As he wrote down. The two laws. About electromagnetic forces. And gravitational fields. On a piece of paper. He spoke. In hushed. And awed. And reverent terms.

That these are the things. That make us what we are. What was he doing? He was worshipping. Is that any different?

[17:38] To verse 19. Looking at the stars. And the heavens. And saying. That's our God. That's what we worship. Both ways. It's worshipping something in creation. It's reducing knowledge.

To what you can see. And touch. As if that is the only form of knowledge. But that is not true. Is it? Let me put it this way. How do you know. Your friends. Or.

Your husband or wife. If you're married. How do you know them? Is it because you can see them? Or hear their voice? Well not really is it? It's more than that. You have a relationship with those people.

Because you trust them. That trust grows over time. As the relationship grows over time. And that's true. With all the most important things. We can know in life. Are not things.

We can measure. Or give empirical proof for. Are things we know. Because we trust. And really. That's Moses' big point here. The Lord is incomparable. In his being.

[18:34] He's not a thing. That you see. He's a being. Who you know. And so you don't know him. By seeing him. You know him. By trusting him. You know him. By trusting him.

That's where his covenant faithfulness. Comes in. And is so important. Because God is faithful. To his covenant. And as we trust him. We experience that.

And see that. Now Moses lays that out for them. In a couple of ways. First of all. Verse 20. He shows them. They are loved. God is committed to them. See that. Verse 20. What's their experience of the Lord?

But the Lord has taken you. And brought you out of the Iron Furnace. Out of Egypt. To be a people of his own inheritance. As you are this day. See that's their experience.

The Lord has loved them. Chosen them. Rescued them. Brought them to himself. For those of us who are Christians. That is our experience as well. The Lord has rescued us from sin.

[19:29] Rescued us from the inevitable fire of hell. That awaits all who reject him. Has chosen us. Placed his love upon us. Called us to himself. Through the Lord Jesus Christ. We are his covenant people.

Loved by him. In covenant with him. We experience him. As we trust him. And that's going to go one of two ways.

You can see that as you look down. Moses starts to explain to the Israelites. What this covenant means for them. Look down. He uses two descriptions of the Lord here. Verse 24.

He says. The Lord your God is a consuming fire. A jealous God. That's one side of the coin. If you like. The other side of the coin. Verse 31. What does he want to tell them there?

The Lord your God is a merciful God. He is jealous on the one hand. He is merciful on the other. How we live before him. How we trust him or not.

[20:27] Will lead to how. Which way we experience him. Or how we experience him. So let's follow that through in the text. And see what it means. First of all. Let's deal with this idea of him being a jealous God.

Jealousy sounds like a very negative thing. Doesn't it? If we're jealous of our neighbours BMW. Then it is a very negative thing. It's wrong. Some people will say. How can you worship a God? The God of the Old Testament is horrible. He's jealous. Jealousy is bad. But let's think for a moment. Jealousy is a good thing. When you're jealous for something you have exclusive rights to. So think about marriage for example. If a man comes home. And finds his wife. Up in the bedroom with someone else. Should he not feel jealous?

He is committed to her. He loves her. And if that commitment is being betrayed. By going off with someone else. Then he is right. To feel jealous. Put it the other way.

[21:26] If he walked into the bedroom. Oh. Well that's alright. I don't mind. I love you. Do what you want to. Would that really be love? Of course not. If you're exclusively committed to someone.

In a loving relationship. Then you will feel jealousy. You will want them. Not out of self-interest. But out of love for their good. As well as your own. So it is with God.

A sign of the fact he loves us. Because he loves us. He is jealous. He doesn't want us worshipping anything else. Because that will destroy us. Remember our call to worship. At the start. From Psalm 115. The gods of the nations.

Just statues. Those who worship them. Become like them. It is dehumanising. To worship an image. Instead of the living God. So God is jealous for us. He loves us.

And that's what the Israelites. Are going to find. We don't have time to read it all. Completely. But if you look on. From verses 24 onwards. We find Moses describing. What will happen to them. If they

go away.

[ 22 : 23 ] And they make idols. Instead of worshipping the living God. They'll end up. Thrown out of the land. Decreasing in number. Instead of multiplying in number. They will find the Lord. Is a jealous God. Afflicting them.

Because he loves them. To turn them back to himself. Sometimes affliction. Difficulty. Comes into our lives. Because the Lord loves us too much. To let us go our own way. He's calling us back. To dependence upon him. And that's where we get. To the other side of the coin. Let's pick it up in verse 29. Moses having described them. Going into exile. Losing the land.

God had promised to them. By not being faithful. To the covenant. Says this. But from there. From this foreign land. You will seek the Lord your God. And you will find him.

If you search after him. With all your heart. And with all your soul. When you are in tribulation. And all these things. Come upon you. In the latter days. You will return. To the Lord your God. And obey his voice.

[ 23 : 18 ] Why? For the Lord your God. Is a merciful God. He will not leave you. Or destroy you. Or forget the covenant. But with your fathers. That he swore to them.

See that's God's promise. He is the real God. We experience him. As we trust him. Where we fail to. He is a jealous God. He will send things into our lives.

To bring us back to him. And when we turn back to him. He is a merciful God. He forgives. With a great promise. 1 John chapter 1 verse 9. And if we confess our sins.

He is faithful and just. To forgive us our sins. And to cleanse us. From all unrighteousness. See Israel needed to remember. That their God is incomparable. Couldn't be compared to something in creation.

Incomparable in his being. Incomparable in his covenant faithfulness. He was not an object to look at. But a being. A person to relate to. To trust. And that's how they will know him.

[ 24 : 16 ] Brothers and sisters. That's how we know him as well. Because all the most important things in life. Are not known. By empirical observation. And by seeing them.

But by trust. And experience. He is a jealous God. He is a merciful God. And he will not forget. His covenant. He is incomparable in his being.

And in his covenant faithfulness. Well they must remember the reality. Of his glorious revelation. Remember the reality. Of his incomparable being. And finally. Very briefly. Remember the reality. Of his unrivaled authority. Verses 32 to 40. I have a friend. I got an email from him this week. He comes to church occasionally. And he is in his 70s now.

He tells me he has been praying to Jesus. Since he was a child. The photos he sent me this week. Are from Thailand. Where he is on holiday. Travelling around with a friend. And pictures of Buddhist temples. Now I know.

[ 25 : 10 ] Because I know this guy. That he is not just there. Because of the history. And the beauty. But actually he has a great attraction. To Buddhism. And so he is doing some. Sort of worshipping. And meditation. When he is at these temples.

And in a sense. This is a great example. Of the spirit of our age. He says. Oh you can't really know. No religious truth. All religions are basically the same. It is nice you can.

It is nice that we can come here. And worship our God our way. It is nice that. My friend. Go with his Thai friend. To a Buddhist temple. And worship in his way. That is the spirit of our age. Isn't it? Similar in Israel's day.

Every nation had their own God. And so who was to say. That Israel's God. Was better than Moab's God. Or the Canaanite God. Or the Amorite God. Moses wants him to remember.

The reality. Of the Lord's unrivaled authority. Look at verse 32 there. For ask now. The days that are past. Which were before you. Since the day the Lord. The God created man on the earth.

[ 26 : 09 ] And ask from one end of heaven. To the other. Whether such a great thing. Has ever happened. Or has ever heard of. Did any people. Ever hear the voice of a God. Speaking out of the midst of a fire.

As you have heard. And still live. Has anyone ever experienced this grace. As Moses. The real living God. Speaking. Are you not being destroyed. By his otherness and power.

There's his grace. Or verse 34. Has any God ever attempted. To take a nation for himself. From the midst of another nation. By trials. By signs. By wonders. And by war.

By a mighty hand. And an outstretched arm. By great deeds of terror. All of which the Lord God. Did for you. In Egypt. Before your eyes. The Lord. Who completely destroyed.

Showed his power. Over the gods of Egypt. By turning the Niles of blood. Etc. Etc. By rescuing Israel. Out of the superpower of the day. He has unrivaled authority.

[ 27 : 06 ] That's what all that was about. And we have experienced that in its fullness. Not just the shadow of the exodus. But the real exodus. As the Lord Jesus. Defeats Satan and all his powers.

Through his cross and resurrection. Sets us free. From our own sinful nature. Sets us free from our rebellion. Sets us free from Satan's kingdom. And brings us into the kingdom of the son he loves.

The Lord Jesus Christ. Do they want no secular ideology. Or any other religion to do. And why did God do all this? Verse 35. To you it was shown.

That you might know. The Lord is God. There is no other besides him. Remember his unrivaled authority. Don't look for freedom in your work.

In your pleasure. In your ideology. In anyone else's religion. But only in this God. Who has all power. Verse 36.

[ 28 : 02 ] Out of heaven he let you hear his voice. That he might discipline you. The idea behind that is teach. And on earth he let you see his great fire. And heard the words in the midst of your fire. Why did he do all this?

Was it because Israel had learnt it? Because they were good? Because they were more religious than the other nations? No. Verse 37. And because he loved your fathers. And chose their offspring after them.

And brought you out of Egypt with his own presence. See here's his unique love. This only God. Has made these great promises.

That he will never forget. Based entirely on his love. His voluntary committing himself to his people. And if we've trusted in Christ.

The New Testament tells us. Galatians 3.19. 29. We are Abraham's offspring. We are those of faith. We are those. Who are included in God's covenant.

[ 28 : 59 ] Those whom he will not forget. Those whom he has set his love upon. That is our privilege. The God who is an unrivaled authority. Has done all this for us.

So verse 39. Know therefore and lay it to your heart. That the Lord is God. In heaven above. And on earth beneath. There is no other. Jesus shall take the highest on. Jesus is worthy of all praise.

Therefore verse 40. You shall keep his statutes and his commands. Which I command you today. That it may get well with you. And with your children after you. That you may prolong your days. In the land the Lord your God is giving you.

But he's not just giving us land. Through uniting us to Christ. He's given us so much more. Hasn't he? Forgiveness of sins. A new nature as the Holy Spirit. Works our union with Christ.

Out with us. And renews us. And makes us new people. And ultimately. Those full promises of the land will be realised. When Christ returns. We inherit not only a piece of real estate in Palestine.

[ 30 : 01 ] But the whole earth. Made new. With no more sickness. Death or crying or pain. And all this is grounded. Not in myth and legend. But in God's majestic revelation of himself.

In the scriptures. And all clearly through Christ. Through his death and resurrection. So for us. To remember that reality. Is to embrace those covenant promises.

To come to Christ in faith. To eat the bread and drink the wine. Laying hold of him. Knowing the reality. Of his majestic revelation. The reality. The reality.

Of his incomparable being and character. His faithfulness. To his covenant. His promises he holds out to us. In these visible signs. We remember the reality.

Of his unrivaled authority. The Lord is our creator. He made us. And our redeemer. He has bought us. At great price. We are his. Why? Because he chose.

[ 30 : 56 ] To love our fathers. And to make these promises. Let's pray.