

Deuteronomy 9:6 - 10:4

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[0 : 0 0] Well, I don't know if you are on Facebook. If you're not, congratulations. You're probably! You're probably not missing very much. I know some of you are. You're my friends now, officially. Martin Wahlberg has told us so. I don't know if you've spent any time on Facebook then you'll probably know some people are really into doing these little kind of quizzes, these little questionnaires, like a personality test thing. So some will ask you eight or nine questions and they'll tell you which house you'd be in if you were at Hogwarts School, whether you'd be Slithering or Gryffindor or whatever. Others will tell you which character from Winnie the Pooh you're most like. So if you're desperate to have someone affirm you're really piglet, then you can do this if you like. Now a friend of ours the other day did one of these tests and she actually proudly, and with no sense of irony, put on her Facebook status. What dictionary word sums you up? I got fascinating. There's a description underneath.

Please, your genuine humility makes you stand out in a crowded room. Everyone looks up to you because you're extremely smart. I can't read this without giggling. You're approachable due to your humility. How you can tell your 400 friends on Facebook you're humble, I don't know. Anyway, what that shows, of course it's true of all these things, is as you answer these questions, really they don't tell you anything about you, they tell you what you think about yourself. So our dear friend thinks she's fascinating. Now I wonder what dictionary word do you think sums you up? You don't have to tell me, don't worry. I guess for a lot of us, we know our theology, we know that we're sinners saved by grace, we know we're totally undeserving, but actually, don't we really have a nagging feeling we're pretty good, really? We're pretty good. We're not that bad anyway. And I think that comes out in a number of ways. It comes down first to that we often look down on other people. Maybe look down on other churches, their theology isn't as good as ours, is it? Or look down on other groups in society and think, well, they're really beyond the pale. I haven't given in to those sins. Or we take pride in our own achievements. I think if you'd ask me when I was at primary school, what do you think about yourself? I would have told you I'm good. I'm good. I don't get into trouble at school. I learn my memory verses in Sunday school. I generally obey my parents, at least when they're looking. I'm a nice person. And as adults, don't we end up thinking the same way? Even a bit more, perhaps a bit more sophisticated. I give money to the church. I do well in my job. I'm pretty moral. Well, sometimes we get it in our sense of entitlement. I deserve to get the promotion I just got, because I've been doing well. God's looking after me because I've earned it. Or conversely, we pray, Lord, I'm trying to be faithful. I'm trying to be good. Why won't you give me the life partner I long for? Why won't you give me the job I long for? Have that sense of entitlement. And all that really comes back to thinking that actually we're pretty good. That would be our Facebook status. And Moses here, as he's preaching to Israel, is looking ahead to the day when God has, in his grace, fulfilled his promises to them. Having rescued them from Egypt, having brought them through the wilderness, he will have taken them into the promised land, driven out of the other nations. And Moses sees the temptation in that day will be to think that they are good. Look down to verse 4, will you?

Slightly before the verses I had Penny readers, but it's all part of our passage. Verse 4, do not say in your heart, after the Lord your God has thrust them out from before you, it is because of my righteousness that the Lord has brought me in to possess this land. Whereas it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord is driving them out. In these chapters the Lord has constantly warned Israel that it's not because of anything in them that he's looking after them and blessing them. Chapter 7, verse 7, he says it's not because you're many in number that I've chosen you. It's just because I love you. Chapter 8, verse 17, he says when you get these things, it's not because you've got the power to possess them. It's because I've given you the ability to possess

them. And here he says it's not because you're righteous.

It's not because you're good. You're not. It's because of their wickedness. Now we know these things in our heads, don't we? Those are so Christians. But we need to keep them in our hearts as well, don't we? So we don't get proud. So we don't look down on others. So we don't end up with a sense of entitlement as we pray. We need to keep relearning these truths. We need to hear the implicit warning in verse 5 as well, don't we? The Lord drove out the other nations because they were wicked. He is the judge of all the earth.

[4 : 53] He is the holy judge. So how can rebels like you and I be confident before this holy, awesome God? Where is our confidence going to lie? How can we be confident we'll make it through life safely to our home in glory? How could Israel be confident? Well, Moses firstly exposes the false basis for their confidence. Then he gives them the proper basis for their confidence and then we'll see towards the end the total confidence we can have as God's new covenant people. So let's look first of all at the false confidence. Look at verse 7, will you?

Remember, and do not forget, Moses talking to Israel, how you provoked the Lord your God to wrath in the wilderness. From the day you came out of the land of Egypt until you came to this place, you have been rebellious against the Lord. See, the only safeguard against spiritual pride is to look at our own hearts and our hearts are revealed by our history, aren't they?

By the story of our lives, where we've gone astray. That was certainly true for Israel. Moses saying, don't forget the story of your lives. It shows your heart. You've been rebellious since the day the Lord rescued you. So the false confidence is in your own worthiness, Israel.

The false confidence, IPC, is in our own worthiness, our own goodness, our own cleverness. And so Moses picks on, first of all, the most grotesque example of Israel's unfaithfulness.

And yet there's a bit of this in all of us. Look at verse 8. Even at Horeb you provoked the Lord to wrath. And the Lord was so angry with you that he was ready to destroy you. Horeb is just another name for Sinai.

[6 : 35] Moses is taking them back to Exodus 32 to 34. The scene was set. The people of Israel had met with the Lord God at Sinai. They'd heard God speak to them out of the fire. They said, yes, we will be your people. We will be your covenant people. Exodus 24, the leaders of the nation had gone up and had a meal with God to seal the covenant there on Sinai.

And now by the time we get to Exodus 32, the only thing that was missing was the covenant documents that were the sign and seal of the covenant, if you like. If you put it in modern terms. The point Moses is taking them back to is their wedding day. They'd just been married.

They'd had the wedding reception. They'd enjoyed the meal. And now Moses is like going off to get the wedding certificate, if you like. That's what Ten Commandments were. The written record of the covenant. While he goes off to get the wedding certificate, the marriage certificate, Israel is committing adultery. Like a bride running off to the hotel room quickly with the best man while the groom's out the room. That's what was going on. That's what Moses is talking about. We pick up the story in verse 10.

The Lord gave me the tablets of stone written with the finger of God. And on them were all the words of the Lord that had spoken with you out of the mountain, out of the midst of the fire on the day of assembly. It's God's personal words to them, written by him. And at the end of the forty days and forty nights, the Lord gave me the two tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant. This is the wedding certificate, if you like. While Moses is fasting out the mountain for forty days and forty nights, what were the people doing down the bottom?

They made a golden calf. They'd broken the first two commandments straight away. They'd worshipped the golden calf as if it was the God that had led them out of Egypt. Exodus 32 verse 6 gets the contrast completely. We read there, while Moses is fasting, they, the people of Israel, rose up early the next day and offered burnt offerings and brought peace offerings to the statue. And the people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play. They were having a big, idolatrous, adulterous party. Having just said they would swallow the Lord God Almighty. Well, you see what the Lord thought about that. If you look at verse 12, as Moses picks up the story there, over the page on verse 12.

[9 : 01] Then the Lord said to me, Arise, go down quickly from here. For your people, whom you have brought from Egypt, have acted corruptly. They have turned aside quickly out of the way that I commanded them. They have made themselves a metal image. Furthermore, the Lord said to me, I have seen this people. And behold, it is a stubborn people. Literally a stiff-necked people, like an ox

that can't be turned where it's supposed to go. I guess none of us have gone playing with oxes. But we've all had those supermarket trolleys and Tesco, haven't we? Or even worse, even worse, Ikea. Just don't go where it's supposed to go. The Lord says, that's what you're like. That's who you are. Let me alone, verse 14, that I may destroy them and blot out their name from under heaven. And I will make of you, Moses, a nation mightier and greater than they. See what the Lord is threatening to do because of this rebellion. He's disowning them. He's no longer saying they're my people. They're your people, Moses. You brought them out of Egypt. They're yours. Nothing to do with me. He's going to disown them. He's even prepared to ditch his covenant with Abraham. That's the implication of verse 14. He promised

Abraham he'd make him a great nation, that all the nations of earth be blessed through him. Now the Lord is saying, Moses, I'm going to destroy them and make a great nation out of you instead. There's a visual demonstration of that. Look what Moses does, verse 17. He comes down the mountain as he sees the golden calf, sees what they're doing. Verse 17. So I took hold of the two tablets and threw them out of my two hands and broke them before your eyes. It's not that he was tired carrying them down. It's not that he was angry, per se.

He's demonstrating what they've done with the covenant. These were covenant documents written by God's own hand. Moses smashes them because they smashed their relationship, the way they treated God. To go back to the wedding illustration, it's like, it's not just tearing up the wedding certificate, not just tearing up the marriage certificate. It's like tearing up all the love letters the bride had ever written to the groom because they were meaningless. The way she has behaved destroys the relationship. That's why Moses breaks the tablets. See, when we break God's law, we don't really transgress a written code. We break the heart of a God who loves us. We offend against his will, against what he has personally written, personally revealed.

So what does Moses do about this? Verse 18. Then I lay prostrate before the Lord as before. For forty days and forty nights, I neither ate bread nor drank water because of all the sin that you had committed in doing what was evil in the sight of the Lord to provoke him to anger. Hear the three different words, three different pictures he gives us of rebellion there. It's sin, you're missing the mark. You're provoking him to anger and hot displeasure. You're doing evil in the sight of the Lord. It's what sin is. And why does Moses respond like this? Why does he fall down on his face? Verse 19.

For I was afraid of the anger and hot displeasure that the Lord bore against you, so that he was ready to destroy you. See, Moses understands the heart of this problem. It's how they've treated God. I wonder, how do you and I typically respond when we know we sinned, when we know we failed?

[12:35] If I'm honest, I just often get disappointed and angry with myself because I haven't lived up to my own standards. I've let myself down. Well, sometimes we're angry or sorry about the consequences, aren't we? That's the classic thing when you hear a politician apologising, isn't it? I'm really sorry, dot, dot, dot, I'm sorry I got caught, is what they're saying.

Sometimes we're like that, aren't we? We regret the consequences of our actions. But Moses here models godly sorry for us. He's sorry because of what Israel has done to the living God, to their offence against him. Not to their own self-image or to their own future success.

But he's sorry about what they've done to evoke God's anger. One of the great purists and writers, John Owen, in writing on the mortification of sin, trying to put sin to death in our own lives, says this. He said, it's good, it's good for our Christians to meditate on the evil and horror of sin and how it rightfully leads to our destruction. He says this, to judge that an evil way will end in destruction is a Christian's duty. Not to do it is atheism.

Not to think that our sin rightly incurs God's wrath and judgment is atheism, says John Owen. It's right for us to remember how our sin offends the holy God, how it grieves the Holy Spirit.

Galatians 4 verse 30, he sealed us to the day of redemption. How it wounds the Son of God afresh. Every harbouring of sin he came to destroy wounds and grieves him, says John Owen, reflecting on Hebrews 6 verse 6. And yet aren't we like Israel? Aren't our hearts just idol factories, as John Calvin said back in the 16th century? An idol is not necessarily a metal image. An idol can be anything that absorbs our attention, our time, our affection more than God does. It can be anything we look for for our security rather than looking to God for. It's anything we look to for things that only God can give. Whether that's wholeness, identity, purpose, satisfaction. We've all got idols somewhere, don't we? Often for us men it can be our work, can't it? We think our work, we look for our work to be security

for us, to be our sense of identity. Well, I am a minister in a church. I am where you are. That becomes our identity.

[15:09] Or we can look for our identity or make an idol out of our achievements, be it academic or sporting or as parents. Or we can look for security in our fantasies or our relationships.

All these things can be idols, absorbing our attention and affections more than living God does. But idolatry is not our only problem, is it? It wasn't Israel's only problem. Moses is charting here all their sin. He focuses on what they did at Horeb, but there are other places as well in their journey they saved. Look down to verse 22, will you? We'll pick up the story there. At Tebera also, and at Massa, and at Kibroth, at Hathavah, you provoked the Lord your God to wrath. He's reminding them of their journey. At Tebera, Judges 11, Numbers 11, they complained about their misfortunes. What misfortunes were they? They'd been rescued from Egypt. They'd been brought through the Red Sea. They had the fiery pillar and the cloud to guide them. God was providing for them. They'd say, oh, life's so tough. They complained about their misfortunes. And yet we don't, don't we often find fault in God's providences? Oh, if only I had that job, life would be better. If only my salary was that bit better. If only my spouse was a bit different. If only my kids were better behaved. We find fault in God's providences. And at Massa, Exodus 17, they grumbled about water. They tested God. They doubted his provision. Don't we sometimes do that? Does God really care about me? Surely if he did, life would be easier, wouldn't it? Or Kibroth Hathavah, Numbers 11 again. Literally graves of craving. They were dissatisfied with God's provision, with the manna he'd sent for them. They wanted the pleasures of Egypt. So if only we could go back to Egypt, that would have been better. Do we sometimes get dissatisfied with what we have as Christians? Sometimes crave what the world offers? Oh, if only I had more money, it would be better. If only I wasn't a Christian, I could go out with that guy at school who really likes me, and that would make life a lot happier for me. All these attitudes are signs of our rebellious hearts. And that wasn't the end of it, was it? Look on at verse 23. When the Lord sent you up from Kadesh Barnea, saying, go up and take possession of the land that I've given you, then you rebelled against the commandment of the Lord your God, and you did not believe him or obey his voice. It was unbelief. Grumbling, complaining, craving what the world has, not trusting God's promises. That was Israel's story. That's what they should have had on their Facebook status, so they updated it every day. Well, do we feel about their sin the way Moses felt? I was afraid, verse 19, of the anger and hot displeasure of the Lord? Do we see ourselves in Moses' conclusion in verse 24? See what he says? You've been rebellious against the Lord from the day that I knew you. Is that the word that sums us up?

Not fascinating, but rebellious. Joseph Allen, who was a preacher in Taunton back in the 1650s, wrote this wonderful line I came across recently, speaking about God's free grace in saving us. He said this, God finds nothing in man to turn his heart, but enough to turn his stomach. He finds enough to provoke his loathing, but nothing to excite his love. That's right, isn't it? It's the Bible's description of each one of us. There's nothing in us that calls out for God's love.

Nothing in us to turn his heart. We are rebellious, like Israel. So how dare we look down on others? How dare we think, well, we've got it sorted. We're part of IPC. We're Christians. How dare we look down on others? Their rebellion may be expressed in ways that we find particularly offensive. But we all come to the cross in a level playing field. How dare we think that the fruit we see in our own lives is a result of our own godliness and natural goodness.

[19:27] It's all of God's grace. How dare we have confidence in our own fruitfulness and abilities. To have such confidence is false confidence and ugly pride. See, confidence in our own worthiness is the false confidence that Moses condemns here. He rubs Israel's nose in their history so that they and we do not forget our natural hearts. We have been rebellious against the Lord since the day Moses first knew us, as it were. So where can we have confidence?

What is the proper confidence? Well, the proper confidence is not in our unworthiness, but in the Lord's character. Look on to verses 25 through 10. We see the proper confidence we can have as we listen to Moses' prayer. As Moses goes back up the mountain to pray and intercede for his people. Look how he prays, verse 25.

So I lay prostrate before the Lord for these forty days and forty nights, because the Lord has said he would destroy you. He's lying on his face, not eating or drinking, a sign of absolute humility before God. Because Moses knows he doesn't have a bargaining chip. He doesn't have any goodness to claim. He doesn't have any rabbits to pull out the hat. So here's a good reason to forgive us. He lies dependent upon God. Here are how he prays. There are three aspects to his prayer. Verse 26. I

pray to the Lord, O Lord God, do not destroy your people and your heritage whom you have redeemed through your greatness, whom you brought out of Egypt with a mighty hand. The Lord has said, Moses, these are your people you brought out of Egypt, back in verse 13. Moses says, no, Lord, they're your people. He reminds the Lord of his covenant with these people. He reminds them that he's redeemed them. You've bought them. You've chosen them. You've rescued them. They're yours. That's the first thing. Your people. Your redeemed people. Secondly, verse 27, he reminds them of his covenant promises. Remember your servants, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Do not regard the stubbornness of this people or the wickedness of their sin. Remember the promises you made. Remember that commitment, that covenant you entered into, the Lord. Remember that. So remember they're your people. It's your covenant. And verse 28.

Here's the final part of his prayer. Remember all this, lest the land from which you brought us say, because the Lord was not able to bring them into the land that he promised, and because he hated them, he brought them out to put them to death in the wilderness. Say, Lord, think of your reputation.

[22 : 13] Think of the honour of your name. What will Egypt say? What will the surrounding nations say? They'll say you weren't able. They'll say you're like our gods. You're nothing special. So what Moses is basing his prayer on? It's all in the Lord's character and priorities.

The Lord's choice in redeeming them. The Lord's gracious choice in his covenant with Abraham. The Lord's jealousy for his own glory and reputation. That he has pinned on the state and the fate of his people.

How does the Lord respond to this kind of prayer? Look down to chapter 10, verse 1, will you? See, it's still game on. This relationship still exists. The covenant continues.

The Lord himself will write those tablets again. He tells Moses to put them in an ark, in a box, so they're there as a lasting memorial of this relationship, of this covenant commitment of the living God. And also the journey goes on, verse 6.

The people of Israel journeyed from Beeroth, Benejacham to Moserah. The Lord kept going with them. The journey to the promised land kept going. And furthermore, verse 6, the second part of it.

[23 : 38] There Aaron died, and there he was buried. And his son Eliezer ministered his priest in his place. So if you listened as Penny was reading, back in verse 20, the Lord had been angry with Aaron and threatened to destroy him.

Now that was because Aaron had a sense led the people in their sin. But Aaron was the high priest. The priest existed. His job was to make atonement for the people's sin. So if the Lord destroyed the priest, there'd be no more atonement for sin.

There'd be no hope for sinners. Yet here, even as Aaron dies, the Lord raises up his son Eliezer to be a successor. The priesthood continues. The relationship can be maintained.

Forgiveness is still possible. See, the Lord is answering the prayer. And even better, it goes on, verse 8. At that time, the Lord set apart the tribe of Levi to carry the ark of the covenant of the Lord, to stand before the Lord, to minister to him, and to bless in his name to this day.

The ark of the covenant was a visible symbol and vehicle of God's presence with the people. So as the Lord provides the Levites to carry the ark, what he's providing is a way for that visible symbol of God's presence to be with the people.

[24 : 50] He's saying, I'm still travelling with you. And they weren't just there to carry the ark. They were there to minister in God's name, to make sure the sacrifices could go on. And furthermore, what were they to do? To bless in his name.

The benediction we have at the end of this service is the benediction the Lord wanted the priests to pronounce in those days. So the Lord answers Moses' prayer, doesn't he?

He doesn't destroy the people. Rather, he maintains the covenant. He maintains a means of forgiveness. He travels with his people, and he is there to bless them, not destroy them.

That is the grace of God, isn't it? It comes from his character, not from our worthiness. So the Lord listened to this prayer. So for us, this is our confidence, isn't it?

When we sin, when we've blown it again, this is our confidence. The Lord's character, not our worthiness. That he has redeemed us.

[25 : 50] His precious and very great covenant promises to us. His own reputation. As he's redeemed us for the praise of his glorious grace, as he sang earlier.

And as we struggle with difficulties in life, whatever your particular challenges are, this can be our confidence as we pray that the God who has given us so much will continue to sustain us and love us, not because we are worthy, but because he is the great covenant-keeping, faithful God who makes these promises.

See, Moses wants us to be sure of the false basis for confidence, our own worthiness. He wants us to see the proper basis for our confidence. The Lord's great character.

But there's something else we see. How we can have total confidence. Because we come later in the story. Here, when Moses broke the two tablets, the Ten Commandments on it, it looked like the covenant was broken.

Well, the Lord restored it then. But as the Old Testament goes on, as we know, Israel didn't really learn properly from this. So eventually they went into exile. And while they were in exile, the Lord spoke through the prophet Jeremiah.

[27 : 07] Jeremiah 31, verse 31. Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. Not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt.

My covenant that they broke, for I was a husband, declares the Lord. They broke that covenant. But I'm going to make a new one, says the Lord. Hebrews expounds that new covenant.

Hebrews 8, verse 13, says that in speaking of a new covenant, God made the old one obsolete. So we come through a new covenant. We come through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Through his blood. The old covenant had sacrifices of sheep and goats and bulls. But they could not take away sin properly. The perfect sacrifice of the Son of God on the cross is providing eternal salvation for us.

The old covenant appointed priests who are sinners, like Aaron. Like his son Eliezer. In the new covenant, we have a perfect priest who, as we sung already, stands at the right hand of God to intercede for us.

[28 : 17] We don't just have a Moses to pray for us. Moses used to speak with God as a man sticks with his friends, we read in Exodus. But we have one at God's right hand who speaks to his Father as a son.

And yet also as a man who stands for us. Our advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. As those words of assurance had earlier.

But that's not all. As we close, we look down to verse 11 of chapter 10. The Lord said to me, Arise, go on your journey at the head of the people so they may go in and possess the land which I swore to their fathers to give them.

Moses was to go and lead those people on. After Sinai, he also sinned. So Joshua was the one who got to lead them in to the promised land. Joshua, the Greek name that we have in our Bibles is Jesus.

Or Joshua, the Hebrew name which we have in Greek as Jesus. We are led into our promised land by the Lord Jesus. He is our rescuer. He will take us safely home. His blood is atoned for all our sins.

[29 : 25] His prayers sustain us on the way. He is the one who will take us in to this promised land. Into the internal inheritance that God has for us. Do you see where our confidence lies?

We can have total confidence because of our Lord Jesus Christ. This great mediator. The one who gives us confidence. That gives us confidence in our hope as we journey on.

That he will bring us safely home. And it gives us confidence in our mission. If you look back to the start of chapter 9, this really is pretty much the end now, I promise. The Lord had given Israel a mission, hadn't he?

Chapter 9, verse 1. Hear, O Israel, you are to cross over the Jordan to go in to dispossess nations greater and mightier than you, cities great and fortified up to the heavens, a people great and tall, the sons of the Anakim, whom you know and of whom you've heard it said, who can stand before the sons of Anak?

Sounded like Mission Impossible, didn't it? Their mission was by the sword to bring God's rules to that part of the world. Our mission today is not to go by the sword to bring God's kingdom.

[30 : 32] Our mission is to declare the good news of the kingdom. The good news that the king reigns and all who will repent and trust in the Lord Jesus can be forgiven and be part of his kingdom.

And who goes ahead of us on that mission? I'm with you always, says the Lord Jesus. He is the one who makes that mission possible. As we look out at a secular nation, we think this looks impossible. Yet Jesus is with us. It's his mission. He will make it possible. How can we have confidence to declare the uniqueness of Christ in a pluralistic world? How can we have the confidence to declare the depravity of human sin in a hedonistic culture?

How can we have the confidence to declare human beings' need for God's mercy in a proud, man-centered age? How can we declare the holiness of God in a nation that is morally relativistic, doesn't believe there is any absolute morals?

Our confidence cannot be in ourselves, can it? But it can be in our Saviour who goes before us, our Saviour whose mission it is. As verse 3 puts it, Know therefore today that he who goes over before you as a consuming fire is the Lord your God.

[31 : 54] He will destroy them and judgment ultimately will destroy all those who stand against him and subdue them before you. You shall drive them out as the Lord your God has promised you.

This mission will succeed. Our confidence is not our false confidence in our own worthiness or cleverness, but the total confidence we can have in Jesus Christ, incarnate, crucified, risen, ascended.

He will bring us safely home. Let's pray.