

The Alert Christian

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[0 : 00] Welcome, everyone. My name is Barnetti the Magnificent, and I'm going to need a volunteer. Come on, I need a volunteer from the audience. Anybody? Don't make me pick somebody.

I need a volunteer. Okay, young lady, yes, please come down the front. Let's give her a clap as she comes up. I have a fairly normal deck of cards here, young lady. You can see it's just a fairly normal deck of cards, yes.

What I'm going to get you to do is I'll just give it a quick shuffle. Yep, okay. What I'm going to do is I'm going to get you to take a card. Any card? Pick a card. Oh, that one. Okay, all right. Have a look. Show the audience. Yeah, don't you? I'll turn around.

Show the stream as well. Okay, all right. Now pop that back in there. Wonderful. Okay, what I'm going to do now is just do a bit of hand waving over this.

I'm just going to chop this a couple of times. Hopefully I haven't ruined my trick. Do this. Do this.

And was it this card? What card is that? Okay, wasn't that a card? Okay.

[1 : 07] Was it this card? No. No. Okay. Now, here's the real test. Was it this card? Yeah. Yay! I got it right. Okay, let's give Chloe a round of applause. Thank you very much.

Look at that. It was the... Oh, was it the Joker? Yeah. Well, that's kind of funny, isn't it? That's kind of funny. Now, of course, you are not an audience. You are a church. We are a church. We are the body of Christ who is gathered together to worship our great God and to encourage each other. And I'm not Barnetti the Magnificent. I'm just James. And I don't do magic. It was just all a little bit of deception.

Now, it was silly and entertaining. Well, for me, it was entertaining. But we can easily be tricked. You might be thinking, how did he do that? How did he deceive us so well?

Now, it wasn't actually that important. But we can be tricked and deceived in life. And there can be grave consequences. You know, if we're tricked into buying a car by a salesman, that the car is actually a lemon. It's not a very good car. We don't realise it until it's too late.

We live in a world of misinformation where people on all sides are crying out about being deceived by fake news. It hurts to be deceived. Lied to from a loved one or a colleague.

[2 : 34] It can make us doubt who we are and the things that we hold dear. The author of this book, John, he is writing to a church who is at a very dangerous risk of being deceived about who Jesus is and who they were as a church and who they were to be as Christians.

People have come in and they have been spreading rumours. They have been deceiving people to try and change their views, to take them down another path.

And today, as we see John's word against those deceivers, we will be challenged to watch out for deception. Because we too can be deceived about who Jesus is and who we are to be as Christians.

So as we have a look at this, let me pray for us. Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word that it reveals your son Jesus to us and it reveals you, our Heavenly Father, to us.

We ask that as we look at your word this morning, that you would give us eyes that see clearly and that do not get deceived. And Lord, when we are deceived, we ask that you would help us to understand and to come back to loving and following you wholeheartedly, Lord.

[3 : 46] Amen. So please have your Bibles open. We're in 1 John chapter 3. If you don't have a Bible, there is Bibles at either side door.

There are brown ones. We have written in them. They are a gift for you. We would love you to have a Bible if you don't have a Bible. So please take one of those, put your name in it, write all over it.

That is yours. And as we have a look at 1 John chapter 3, John begins with a sense of urgency, speaking about a group called the Antichrists, those who came in and deceived and who had been deceived.

Have a look with me, 1 John chapter 3 verse 18. Dear children, this is the last hour. And as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many Antichrists have come.

This is how we know it is the last hour. John's got this sense of urgency. Guys, we're living in the last days. We are in the last moments. And his desire for this church is to not be deceived.

[4 : 49] John consistently calls this church dear children, little children. And it's a reminder that little children are easily deceived. I don't know if you've ever done the whole, I pull the coin from behind your ear trick to a small child.

Children are easily deceived. And this church can find it easy to be deceived. And John speaks about the Antichrist. It's something we've probably heard of before.

Maybe we've heard of it in movies. We might have some different ideas about it. And there is two different concepts in the Bible generally when it comes to the Antichrist. There is a specific reference to one individual, the devil, the Antichrist.

And then there is this reference here, which is more general to a number of different people who are Antichrists. So what does it mean? What does it mean? So we've got two options.

Anti can have two different meanings, the word anti. Antichrist. First of all, it can mean those who are against. So if I said, you know, if I said, you know, that person, they're anti-Australian, that means they're against Australians.

[6 : 01] So this group, Antichrists, could be described as those who are against Christ. The word anti can also mean to take the place of.

And so this group could also be described as those who want to steal Jesus' place and substitute it with their own version of Jesus. And so we've got this group who've come in. John describes them as the Antichrists.

Either those who are wanting to take Jesus' place or those who are his enemies, those who are against him. And it actually turns out that this group was from that church to begin with.

But they didn't really belong. Verse 22. Who is the liar? It is whoever denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a person is the Antichrist, denying the Father and the Son.

These people had been part of the church and they'd left and they'd come back and they've had their view of Jesus twisted. They're denying that Jesus is the Son of God.

[7 : 03] And this person is against Christ when they deny that. They're preaching a different kind of Jesus. Jesus who is not the Jesus that's revealed to us in the Bible.

One who isn't the Christ, the chosen one, the Son of God. And John is really concerned for this church that they would be deceived by these Antichrists.

Instead of being tricked, he calls them to remain. Remain in Jesus. Verse 24. See that what you have heard from the beginning remains in you.

Remain in what you have heard from the beginning. Don't change your view of who Jesus is, that he's the Son of God, just because somebody has come in and told you some stories about him. We looked at last week, John's resume in chapter one, where John said that he had seen and touched and heard Jesus.

Don't just believe other people that have come in who haven't met him, who don't know him, who didn't see him rise from the dead. John is a far more reliable witness. The group that came in to deceive the church was most likely a group called the Gnostics.

[8 : 12] Gnostic is all about knowledge. They believed they had a special revelation from God. They believed that they alone had special knowledge from God about who Jesus was.

And you had to have a special religious experience to receive it. But John calls them, don't be deceived by this. Remain in Jesus. You don't need a new special revelation.

You don't need new special knowledge. You've already got that knowledge. You've got it at the beginning. When you first heard about Jesus, that is all that you need. In verse 20, they've already been given an anointing by the Holy Spirit.

They don't need anything new. They don't need anything else to be able to follow this God. It's a reminder that Christianity, sorry, the Holy Spirit opens our eyes to see who Jesus is.

And so we don't need another revelation from the Spirit to see who Jesus is. And so John reminds them in verse 23 that whoever denies that Jesus is the Son of God denies God.

[9 : 19] This is a reminder that Christianity is an exclusive claim. You deny that Jesus is the Son of God. You cannot know the Father. There is only one God. And it is Jesus who reveals him to us.

When the church kept their eyes fixed on Jesus, the same Jesus who had been revealed, well, they wouldn't be deceived. They wouldn't be deceived by the sleight of hand of the Antichrists. But the reality is we don't have this same problem.

We don't have people coming in, preaching from the pulpit, saying you need to believe in this slightly different view of Christ. But yet it is also possible for us today, living in 2021, to be deceived. We can be deceived about who Jesus is. It can be very subtle and it can be from our culture. It can be from other Christians who have got a slightly different view of who Jesus is.

And so I think there are four types of deceptions we can see, at least four types, when it comes to who Jesus is. The first is Red Bull Jesus.

[10 : 26] Does anybody know what one of the slogans of Red Bull is? It gives you wings. Thank you for ladies on my left and right. It gives you wings. Red Bull gives you a boost.

It makes you a little bit better. It's that 10% improvement you need. And so we can be deceived into thinking that we need a Red Bull Jesus. We need just a little bit more.

I just need a push. You know, I'm a pretty great person. And Jesus helps me just get over the line with God. I'm pretty close myself, but I just need God to get me over the line.

And that's all he is to me. Jesus is just an energy drink to help me get to God. Don't be deceived. Ephesians 2 reminds us that we are dead. We are totally dead.

It's not that we need a push over the line. We need, what are those things you have in hospitals? The things you zap people with to make them come back to life? Defibrillators. We need a defibrillator.

[11 : 26] We don't just need a little bit of a drink. We need to go from dead to life. And that only happens because of Jesus. Dead people don't need a push. They need a grave.

And if it wasn't for Jesus, that's where we would be. Instead, Jesus went to the grave for us to redeem us. So we can easily be deceived to think that we are pretty good people and Jesus just helps us get over the line with God.

But that is not the reality. The reality is far greater and far terrible. We don't deserve anything good from God. And yet he gives us good. The second type of Jesus that we can be deceived by is our fairy godmother Jesus.

My kids have been reading a whole lot of fairy tales recently, so I'm thinking fairy godmothers. This version of Jesus gives you whatever you like as long as you follow the rules. You can have salvation, but you can have all the blessings from God, but you've got to follow the rules.

You can have salvation, but if you don't follow my rules, you'll turn into a pumpkin. At 12 o'clock. Is that how the story goes? I can't remember. But this deception ruins our relationship with Jesus because it brings it down to, I have to follow these restrictions so that I can get these blessings.

[12 : 44] This is a very simple little deception that can come in to our relationship with Jesus. Because the Bible does have lots of rules. It does have lots of commands.

But it is not fairy godmother, I'm going to give you these blessings. And I'm going to give you these curses. You've got to be home by 12. God pours out his lavish love on us and calls us to follow him. It is the reverse. He loves us, first and foremost. Instead of having to follow rules, we are given love. And we are called to have a relationship with the one who loves us and continue to love.

And we do that by choosing to obey. The third type of Jesus is skydiving Jesus. I kind of wish I had pictures of each of these. But for many Christians, there can be a chasing after spiritual experiences.

Trying to get a Christian high, like jumping out of a plane. The Gnostics were trying to deceive the church that John is writing to, to say that they had special knowledge.

[13 : 52] They had a special religious experience. And you had to get that. You had to chase that if you wanted to be a real Christian. Other groups today would say similar things. You must have a spiritual experience like speaking in tongues to be truly saved and to be a real Christian.

Nowhere in the Bible does it say that. Don't be deceived, as John said. We have the Holy Spirit. Remain in what we have had from the beginning.

The Holy Spirit reveals the truth of Jesus to us. And so instead of chasing something new, chasing a new spiritual experience, a new spiritual high, instead chase a closer and deeper relationship with the God and Father who has been made known by Jesus.

Fourth, the good man Jesus. This deception is a very common one from our culture. Jesus is a good man. And Christians are to just be good people too.

Jesus inspires us to be good people. And while we are called to be like him, you know, that is not why he came. He didn't call us to just be like him.

[15:03] He didn't make us to just be nice people. He came to take dead people wrapped in grave clothes, stuck in the grave, and make us new people. So Jesus is a good man.

But he's not just a good man. He is God himself who came to do so much more. All of these deceptions start with a good thing. You'll find that true about every heresy that's ever been. Every heresy starts with something really good. Jesus is a good man. We get a spiritual revelation from the Holy Spirit.

God gives us wonderful things. God does help us so much. God does help us. God does help us. Every heresy, every deception starts with a core of truth.

And it just takes it offline. It just takes it too far. John calls us to remain in Jesus. Don't be deceived into following a knock-off, low-cost version of Jesus when the real Jesus is so wonderful.

[16:12] Chase a closer relationship with him as the Holy Spirit reveals him to us through his word. And so John has reminded this church about who Jesus is and not to be deceived.

And now he turns to our confidence in God and who we are as Christians. And all of this comes from our identity. Have a look at the start of chapter 3 with me.

Chapter 3, verse 1. See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called the children of God.

This verse really stood out to me when I was preparing this. I don't think I've ever seen the word lavish in the Bible. I'll have to do a word search on it later. God lavished his love on us.

Lavish is a great word. This is what I do when I'm preparing, if I'm having toast and butter. This is how I have butter on my bread. I lavish it.

[17:13] Usually for me, bread and butter is a one-to-one ratio. Because I think that's the way God has given us those gifts to enjoy. But that's what God does. He lavishes.

He goes over the top expressing his love for us. And verse 2. We shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

We will be made like him, and we will be made pure. And he says in verse 9 that we're given the Holy Spirit like a seed in us, and it blossoms so that we can remain in God.

John is really keen that this church isn't deceived into being confused about who they are as Christians. And he paints this beautiful picture of God's love, his lavish love, and what he does for us.

The Antichrists have come in. They're trying to deceive people about who Jesus is and about what a Christian looks like. And John reminds the church of the beauty of being a child of God.

[18:18] And he builds on this comparison between those who are the Antichrists and those who are Christ's in verse 4. Everyone who sins breaks the law.

In fact, sin is lawlessness. But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin. No one who lives in him keeps on sinning.

No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him. Now, we might have a bit of a confusion about this point. You might see it and do a bit of a double take as Paul was reading it for us for it earlier.

Does that really say that Christians don't sin? I'm a Christian and I've sinned, you know, a dozen times this morning already. Is this part of the Bible possibly wrong?

Or am I just not really a Christian? Some modern Christians have been deceived and preached that Christians don't sin. Full stop. Or that it's possible for Christians to reach a state called sinless perfection.

[19:21] Where Christians just do not sin anymore. But this doesn't make sense of the Christian's experience. This doesn't make sense of the joy of following Jesus. The joy of forgiveness.

And struggling with our sin to continue to follow him. It doesn't make sense of our experience. But it also doesn't make sense of the Bible. It doesn't make sense of just this book alone. 1 John 1.8, which we saw last week, call us to confess our sins.

Because we've forgiven us in Jesus, the advocate before the Father. So, what do we do with this? If in 1 John 1, John says that when you sin, confess. And if he then says in 1 John 3, Christians don't have sin, what do we do with this?

Is John contradicting himself in the space of two chapters? It is very strong language. Verse 9, no one who is born of sin will continue to sin.

So, what do we do? I think there's two ways to understand what is going on at this point. This is going to be a brief stopover in a technical argument. So, please stay with me for this.

[20 : 30] The first is the we don't do this here approach. From verse 6 of chapter 3, no one who lives in him keeps on sinning. And so, this first view says that as Christians, we are saved and we are forgiven.

And yet we still sin, but we're not stuck in sin. The Holy Spirit convicts us of our sin. And whilst we do it, it's different to before because now we know God and now we're not stuck in sin.

And so, the mark of a Christian is that their life reflects God's love shown in Jesus' death. A Christian's life is lived to honour God, to obey Him, bringing glory to Him and to treasure Jesus.

Christians are different after they know God. And so, while they sin, they're not stuck sinning. They're not in the habit of sinning. It'd be me at home, family dinner.

It's about 6 o'clock on a normal night. And I say something like, children, we Barnets sit up straight. We Barnets, we don't have our elbows on the table.

[21 : 37] And we Barnets don't play with our food. But also, at the same time, one of my kids is lying on the floor. One of them is flicking food at their sibling. And me, myself, I'm just spinning pasta on a fork.

It's not true, me saying that we Barnets do all these things. It's not true. But it's a statement of who we are and who we should be. Christians, and so what 1 John 3 could be saying is, Christians are not held in sin.

Christians are called to follow God wholeheartedly with their whole life. Christians aren't held by sin in the same way. That's the first view. The second view is the one I prefer.

But reading a whole bunch of commentaries, a number of people will go into either side, so I'm okay with either. But here, John has spoken about the identity of the Christians and about those who are the anti-Christians, those who are for and against Christ.

And he continues his argument here in chapter 3. He's describing them as either sons and daughters of God or sons and daughters of the devil. The sin he describes as lawlessness is not breaking the Ten Commandments type of sin, but the sin here is of rejecting that Jesus is the Son of God.

[22 : 57] Chapter 2 was all about the identity of Jesus. Don't be deceived about who Jesus was. Remain in Jesus. And now, those who have rejected Jesus, well, they are the ones who do sin and the ones who follow Jesus, they don't.

They don't reject Jesus. So no one who has the Holy Spirit working in their heart can reject Jesus in this sense and sin. Because no one who has the Holy Spirit can say that Jesus is not the Son of God.

And everyone who doesn't have the Holy Spirit, well, they can't see that Jesus is the Son of God. And so all they can do is to sin. It makes this passage a reassurance from John to the church of their salvation.

Your sins have been taken away. And you can see that because you are remaining in Christ. And your fruit of love is for the church.

Regardless of which of these two positions, John is clearly concerned that the church would be deceived by these imposters who would come in. That they would be tricked and deceived by the view of Jesus and who the Christian was.

[24 : 06] We face the same challenge today. That we can forget the wonder and lavish love of God. And we can end up with a knock-off, cheapened version of Christianity.

And so I have three types of Christians that we can be deceived into being. Firstly, is the arrogant Christian. This has been me in the past.

It's the type of Christian that says, you know, Jesus died for my sins, and so it doesn't matter if I do a few more. He's died for them all anyway. What's another couple to the tally?

He's already died and risen again. But what we do does matter. Our sin grieves God. Instead of that, we can actually bring joy and happiness to our Heavenly Father, and glory to Him when we obey.

He offers us to be His children, to pour out His lavish love on us. And so let's not be deceived that what we do doesn't matter, but instead respond to God by loving Him and obeying Him.

[25 : 12] Second is the be true to myself Christian. This is a more modern deception, which takes our culture's love of celebrating people, pursuing their own personal goals, as being true to themselves.

Have you heard of people say, you know, I just want to be true to myself here, and so I'm going to follow this path? We can do that as Christians. And this view glorifies people who say, I'm going to be true to myself, but what that often means is, I'm going to be true to my feelings and my emotions. I am going to let my feelings and my emotions make decisions about who I am and what I will do. We can be deceived as Christians to think along these lines, to value our emotions and feelings too much, and to align our identity with that, particularly when it comes to sexuality. Instead, our identity is created first by God. At the start of chapter 3, our identity is as His children. God has lavished His love on us. We have been made His children, and then our emotions and values get shaped by Him.

It is very dangerous for us to create our identity based on our emotions and feelings first, and not who God has made me to be. Because if I'm basing my decisions on how I feel, today, do you know what?

[26 : 40] I may have been sinning a whole lot, and I might not be feeling like a particularly good child of God. And then that leads me to doubt that I am a child of God.

Instead, the start of chapter 3 reminds us, I am a child of God. God has lavished His love on me. So even though I don't feel that, I know that.

And I want my emotions to come into line with this objective reality from God. Third, this is the insecure Christian. The insecure Christian feels the weight of their sin and the pain of their sin. But the problem with this deception is, it makes the sin too big. Surely God can't forgive me. I'm too bad. I am too sinful for Him. He can't forgive me again.

I've sinned in this way again and again and again. Surely, I've failed Him so many times, He won't forgive me this time. There is a rightness about this pain and grieving when it comes to this sin.

[27 : 42] But the danger with this deception is that it makes this sin bigger than God Himself. It says, God, I'm too big for you to deal with. And it makes God very small.

It makes Jesus' death on the cross very small. We can be deceived that because of Jesus' death, what we do doesn't matter. But it does. We can be deceived into finding our self-worth, into looking inside, instead of looking at the cross.

We can be deceived into thinking too much of our sin, instead of being reminded of how great God's love is for us. No one likes being deceived. In that card trick I did earlier, would you like me to reveal how I did it?

Very, very simple. When dear Chloe took the card, I held the deck back out, and I held it tightly, so that when she put the card in, it wouldn't go all the way in.

And so the card would just be sticking out like that. It's very simple. You don't even have to look at it. You just close the deck, you flip it around, and then you can just feel where the card is.

[28 : 50] And without even looking at it, you can just pull the card out. Very easy little piece of deception. I'm sorry I deceived you and everybody else. But now I've done that trick.

If you're going to hang around for the 11 o'clock service, you'll know. And you'll put your hand up. I'll come up and be the audience member. But now you know how to look out for that deception, you can spot it.

It's not just about keeping our eyes open. We actually need to have our eyes trained for deception. Brothers and sisters, for some of the deceptions around us, our hearts will leap to.

We will willingly be deceived. Others, our culture, will want to close our eyes to who Jesus is and who he has called us to be.

And that's so we don't buy into a cheap Christianity with a knock-off version of Jesus, with a watered-down version of Christianity. As we walk a life following him, with that image on the screen in mind, we need to continue to walk straight following him, but knowing that we will get deceived, we will wander off the path.

[30 : 07] Years ago, when my kids first started getting into Duplo, which is the younger version of Lego, I bought a knock-off version of it on eBay from somewhere.

It could have been China, I'm not sure. Alibaba, I think it was. And it was very cheap. And it came, you know, six months later. And it came, and I thought it was going to be great, but it was different sizes.

And so, it didn't actually fit in with the rest of the Lego that we had. Very frustrating. It's all ended up in the bin. So we don't end up with an unsatisfying Christianity, without a relationship with God, following a totally different version of Jesus.

Keep asking, is this the real Jesus? God, am I following you wholeheartedly, or have I been deceived into following a Jesus that just makes things a little bit easier for me, just makes it a little bit cheaper for me because it's more convenient?

Am I following the Jesus of the Bible, of the reality of human history? Compare it with God's word, knowing that God has given us His spirit so that we can test where we're going.

[31 : 29] We can ask God, am I going following you? So that we can keep our eyes fixed on the real Jesus who loves us. Let me pray for us. Heavenly Father, I thank you so much for the book of 1 John, and for John's clarity in seeing the deceptions around the church and pointing them out for us today.

Heavenly Father, we ask that as we want to continue to follow you, that we want to be people who are shaped by you, that we would have our eyes not just open, but trained to see how we can be deceived by our own hearts and by the world around us, Lord.

help us to keep our eyes fixed on you, trained to know who you are, to not be deceived, so that we will be with you when your son returns.

We ask this in his name. Amen. Amen.