

Love is Alert

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Preacher: Tom Muir

[0 : 00] So please turn back to chapter 2 of 1 John.

We're going to focus on verses 15 to 27. Now, in the series that we're doing the title for tonight's sermon, is Love is Alert. So being alert really has a lot to do with what we're thinking about tonight.

Now, new parents, and this is something I'm discovering, the job of new parents to a larger degree is to be alert to the possibility of harm coming to their child.

So if they go out in public, wherever they go, whatever they do, they're taking this new baby with them, and they're very aware of how vulnerable that child is. So their job, to a large extent, is to be aware of the need and the potential dangers and all the stuff that can happen, and to protect them, and to care for them.

They want to be alert. It's no good if you're careless and you don't care. You want to care and you want to be alert. And the Bible is full of using that kind of language, the kind of picture language where it talks about believers, God's people, like children who need to be protected.

[1 : 23] Often in different ways throughout the Bible, we get that kind of imagery. Children who are learning and who have so much to learn and who are so vulnerable and who need cared for.

Let me read a couple of verses. In Hosea chapter 11, we read, When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt, I called my son. God speaks about his people so tenderly as little children who he wanted to care for because he knew how much they needed his care.

And in Psalm 116, it goes to the other end of the spectrum of life and says, Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints. Precious in the sight of the Lord.

God knows and cares for his people, and he knows them from the beginning of their days to the end of their days. Now, of course, the problem sometimes is that we can be like kids in many ways.

We can be like children in our relation to the Lord, and we can be so oblivious to danger that we're in spiritually speaking. I don't just mean in terms of crossing the road. I trust most of you have learned to cross the road.

[2 : 34] But in terms of the things that come into your life that can do you so much harm in your walk with the Lord, we can be just oblivious to them, and we can be very naive in some ways.

So we can also be willfully naive, and we don't want to listen. And we know what the Lord would say to us, but we don't want to hear it because at that time, maybe we think we know best, or at that time we think we don't want to have anything to do with the Lord.

And though we know that in some way He's calling us and He wants us to be His child, and to listen to Him, we say, not now. They want to listen to you just now.

And so if I go back to Hosea chapter 11, God speaks to His children, but then in verse 2 it says, Now, in verse 1, John writes to vulnerable Christians, and he says, He wants to encourage them on the way.

He says, and we'll come to this, they've got a particular scenario that puts them in danger, something that is like a threat to their faith. And so He wants to support them and say, you're on the right path.

[4 : 07] Keep going down that path. You've got the gospel. Don't be diverted from that path. But He also says to them, you need to take care. You need to be very careful, and you need to be alert.

That's why we're using that word tonight. So if you think back briefly, if you were here last week, a lot of the word that He had for them last week was encouragement because He wanted to say to them, yes, you're on the right track.

Look back at chapter 2, verse 12, 13, 14. He talks about, you have overcome the evil one. You have known the Father. You have known Him who is from the beginning.

That's good. Now we get to this section for this week, and really what we have to say is that there is warning to come. So He's saying encouragement, good, you're on the right track.

Now be careful. Be careful how you live. And that is so often the message that is woven throughout the Bible and the New Testament to God's people.

[5 : 09] Because God knows how vulnerable we are. Now you might not like to hear that tonight. To be reminded that in God's eyes you're like a child who needs Him and who needs encouragement to stay on the right way and who needs direction because there's danger.

Because your enemy, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking who to devour. But that is the message that God wants for us to hear sometimes.

Be alert and be aware of the danger. So there are two ways in which we're going to see this, and they're broken down really obviously in the Bible. The first chunk as it wears from verse 15 to 17.

And that's to do with the direction of what we want in life. And the second section, the longer section, is to do with the attitude that we have about Jesus. These two things are what John writes to the Christians.

So we're going to look at these two in turn. The first one is to do with the general direction of our lives. If you want rhyming, some rhyme tonight, the direction of your affection.

[6 : 18] I used to be an English teacher. The direction of your affection. What is the affection of your heart? What is the thing that you think about the most? What do you want? Well John says to the people that he's writing to, first of all, identifying that and being clear on what that is is really important.

Because if you get it wrong, what it will do is it will take you off the path from knowing your Lord. So be alert to that. This is the first alert. See in verse 15 there, do not love the world or anything in it.

Now, when you first read that, you might think that's a contradiction to other places in the Bible. Don't love the world. We think, well, the world is God's. He made the world and the world is good.

If you go back to Genesis chapter 1, we read, God himself says at the end of his creation, that all that he saw that he had made is good. But if we're thinking about the way that John uses this word world here, we need to understand that there are two different ways of thinking about the world.

We see the world that God made in the creation and the way that God intended the world to be, and we say that's good. But what he's speaking about here when he talks about the world is a kind of attitude of worldliness, where the way of the world is set against God's world, God's ways.

[7 : 42] So in other words, they take the Creator and His world and His ways, and we say, well, that's all very good, but we're going to change it, and we're going to have our own way of making sense of life, and we're going to have our own sense of morals and of values and of what we want from life.

So John says, be careful not to love that kind of worldliness. Love isn't a bad thing either, is it? If we think back a little bit, in this book in chapter 2 verse 10, he said, whoever loves his brother lives in the light.

So that, though, is speaking of a kind of love which wants to give, is like the love that Jesus had who didn't remain in heaven in glory, but who came and gave himself for his people.

Out of his glory and perfection, Jesus gave in love to his people, and the example there of those who love their brothers and their sisters is good. But again here, the kind of love that John is saying is, the kind of love that is all about saying, what can I get from the world?

The world's great. Look at all this stuff that goes on. Look at all the places I can go and the people I can influence and the things I can have, and the way my name could be written in the stars so everybody could look at me.

[9 : 02] I want that. And John just says, don't do that. Be very careful about that. So the affections of your heart, know what they are, and be careful.

And he goes on and we'll see how the next verse sort of opens this up a little bit, gives a little bit more example to how this can work. Verse 16, for everything in the world, so what's he talking about?

Well, the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes, and the boasting of what he has and does. Three things there, okay? Three ways in which he says the way that you can look at the world.

Three ways he explains it. The first one is sort of like an umbrella over the other two. Think about it like that. So the first one that we see there, the cravings of sinful man, again, that has a lot to do with the root of who we are.

The cravings, we know that word. That word is associated negatively often with us. And actually, of all the times it's used in the New Testament, by far the biggest proportion are used negatively, craving after something.

[10 : 10] It's kind of like, you can imagine, grasping. Can you think of Gollum and the Lord of the Rings, desperately grasping in a horrible way for something that he thought would satisfy him?

Ugly, really. So the cravings of sinful man, in other words, and we go back again to a lot of the biblical language about your heart, the direction of your heart in terms of being the seat of who you are, the cravings of your heart if they are sinful.

And that's the umbrella picture that he gives you. The cravings of sinful man. And then the next two really kind of come under that. So let's just look at, look down at verse 16 with me here. The lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does.

So to read the lust of his eyes, you might immediately associate that with sexual temptation, and of course it can include that. But again, I think slightly more generally, this has to do with you looking and seeing and wanting.

More general picture of just looking around at all the world has to offer. And again, you can see things in the world that are perfectly okay and have them, and that's okay. But if your world, if your heart turns all the things of the world into things that you must have in order to satisfy you, and if they become like idols to you, then that's bad.

[11 : 32] John says, do you know if your heart covers these things? Are you aware of that? Be alert to the way that your heart can go after stuff. And that's followed up in the last little example there, the boasting of what he has and does.

All the things that we can kind of attach on to ourselves to create some sort of picture of who we think we are, or our self-esteem can be built up by all the clothes we wear, the way we present ourselves, our status on social media, or whatever it is, the ways in which we can take things, attach them to ourselves, and think, I have these things, so I am now who I want to be.

I'm a good person in the eyes of the world. Don't love the world like that. Don't think that gathering all these things around you, building them up around you, is going to make you great.

We know that even amongst ourselves, we can kid ourselves sometimes into thinking that we're something that we're not. But if you think about it before God, if you stand before the Lord, to say, look at all these things I have, look at who I've become, well, not in any way impress God when you meet with Him.

And so John says, be alert to this, because the world and its desires pass away. Now, I just want to say that we can take a kind of immediate analogy from this and think, well, a lot of this is to do with materialism, and of course it is.

[13 : 05] And it's to do with the way that we react to things around about us and all the things that we surround ourselves with. But it's more than that, isn't it? Because my friend who's not a Christian could recognize the exact same thing.

Your family who's not a Christian might say, yeah, materialism is bad. It doesn't really satisfy you to win the lottery. There's more to this, isn't there?

And what John wants to get the people to see is that if you love the world like this, if you go through life thinking that the stuff that you attach to yourself will make you somebody special in your own eyes or in other people's eyes, then what you're going to be in danger of is not being able to love the Father.

You will not be able to know the love of the Father for you and you will not be able to love the Lord your God in response because you will have put all these other things in front of you.

Or you're in danger of doing that, at least. That's the danger that we face. And that's what John wants these people to see. These vulnerable Christians who live their lives, as we live our lives, surrounded by many different things, he says, this is a general danger that you need to be alert to, that you block out your capacity to have fellowship with God.

[14 : 30] That's what you were made for. That's what God calls you to. That's what he saved you for so that your sins would be forgiven and that so you would know his love and his calling and relationship with him in your life day by day and you could block that and you won't have love for him.

Verse 15b, if anyone loves the world in this sense, the love of the Father is not in him. And in verse 16b, the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does, comes not from the Father but from the world.

So again, this is to do a lot with what are you letting into yourself, into your mind and into your heart. The love of the Father for you, do you know the love that God has for you or do you know everything else that distracts you and is that your priority and is that what you're taking into your heart?

There's another strong example in, let me just read one more verse in James chapter 4. I'll just read this. This should in many ways make us sit up and take notice.

James writes, you adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred towards God? Again, this message has come right the way through the Bible because as the prophets often wrote to the Old Testament people and said, you've completely ignored the Lord who's called you and who's saved you and you've gone after all these idols, sometimes literally.

[16:12] So sometimes our hearts too, if we're honest, can be switched from focusing on the Lord and all the love He has for us in His Son and we focus on so many other things. And sometimes we have to say, have I gone down that path and do I need to come back to the Lord and repent and recognize again His love and follow Him.

So that's a danger. And John wants them to know that it's a danger and that they have to be alert. And so should we.

This love, this knowing the love of the Father, remember that this is first from the Father to us.

So I think sometimes myself and we can think, when we are maybe low in our Christian lives, we can often think, I really struggle to love God and we can so easily get back into basing our acceptance with God on how well we're loving Him.

But we remember, and let me just read one verse from a couple of chapters on in this book in 1 John, that we love because He first loved us. 1 John 4 verse 10.

[17:30] This is love. Not that we love God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. So remembering that is so important so that we can love Him in return.

If you're not able to spend any time reflecting on what Jesus has done for you, remembering that He gave His life for you. And the way in which He was so glad to come from heaven and to give His life for you, then we will not be able to respond and to love Him in return.

And this whole passage really in many ways reminds us of the big vision that God has for us. We think sometimes Christianity can be a bind, it can be boring, it can be negative.

We think it's just about coming to church or we can at least get, that can be the extent of our experience. So all we associate with Christianity is just coming to church and seeing people.

But God has such a big purpose for us. He calls us into fellowship with Him. Now that is no small thing. He calls us to recognize His forgiveness and to know Him and to know the love He had for us.

[18:51] But in many ways, going back to John's Gospel shows us that so many times. In John chapter 14 verse 20, Jesus says to the disciples, on that day you will realize that I am in my Father and you are in me and I am in you.

The closeness that exists there between the Father and the Son and the Spirit is the relationship that as we become Christians we are called into. And so we share in the fellowship and the love of the Trinity.

And that is an incredible calling. It's an incredible calling. So don't block the path to knowing that. Don't put so many other things that seem so great, but actually mean so little in the way.

They can block the way to knowing God. The first thing then is our heart's affection and how we know and love God. The second thing as he goes on from verse 18 is about our attitude towards Jesus.

Now there's a particular thing that was going on that these people had a problem. I said that they were vulnerable Christians. There was a group of people in their fellowship who had splintered away and who had another teaching, another gospel.

[20 : 10] Their gospel wanted to change the way people thought about Jesus. But the thing that they were doing was that they weren't just going off on their own saying, okay, we're just going to go off and do our own thing.

They said, and we want you to follow us. So they were attacking the Christians and they were trying to chip away at the beliefs that the believers had. So these believers, as John saw them, were in danger.

They were like little children who needed help. And they needed to be very careful because their faith was under threat. How does John express this? How does he explain this?

You'll see what these people were trying to do. Two verses. Verse 22. John says, who is the liar? It's the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ.

And then again in verse 26, I'm writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray.

[21 : 12] They said that Jesus wasn't the Messiah, the Anointed One, the Christ. They were changing the message that people had about who Jesus was. And they deliberately wanted to take these vulnerable believers with them.

So there was a total direct attack on the Christians and on the believers. And so in a very obvious way, John is saying to them, do you recognize this?

Are you alert to this threat? And are you protecting what you know? Antichrist, he uses very strong language in this passage, doesn't he?

The thing about these people is that they were setting themselves up against the truth of Jesus, against the true gospel, against Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, the Savior of the world, and they were seeking to take others with them.

And so John uses this very strong language to talk about these people, the Antichrists. And I don't really want to go too much further into that. But just to say that across the key New Testament passages that speak about Antichrists, different descriptions, different ways of explaining this, but the one constant throughout these different passages is that they are those who would set themselves up against Jesus and take people away from Him are deceivers.

[22 : 37] That is the constant that they will try and take people away from the Savior. Now that is the threat. That is the action that the devil always wants to be going on inside a community of Christians.

Whether it's a direct, active threat like this, whether there was a group of people who maybe came into St. Columba's and started to try and influence all of you deliberately and distinctly into saying, actually you've got the wrong idea about Jesus.

Whether it was like that, or whether it's actually more like we do have where you go out and meet many people, friends and different acquaintances, who will question either subtly or strongly your understanding of the gospel.

The devil always wants that message to be bubbling under the surface of a Christian community. He always wants you to be saying, is Jesus really who the Bible says He is?

I don't know if I can be sure about this. I don't know if my sins really matter. Is Jesus really the one who can heal me and who can save me?

[23 : 56] Did He even exist? I don't know. So many people say that He didn't really even exist anyway. Because to do away with Jesus, to do away with the historical Jesus, to do away with Jesus, the one who came from heaven to die for your sins, is of course to undermine the very foundation and the core of what we believe.

If we take Jesus away, then really what do we have? And so that is a threat that we have to face up to. We might not have somebody come in and standing in this pulpit and trying to preach of false Jesus.

But the voice of doubt is one that will confront me and you throughout our lives. So we need to recognise it and we also need to think how we would confront it.

How we would answer somebody, how we know from the Word of God who Jesus is and why we trust in Him. And so the specific picture here is that there are these people who are seeking to take these Christians away.

Now John wants to encourage them. Again, I come back to that. He wants to say to them, you're on the right path. Because he mentions a couple of times, you'll see he used the word anointing, verse 20, being one of them, and later on you have this anointing.

[25 : 16] You have this truth from the Holy One and all of you know the truth. He speaks later about how they don't need anybody else to teach them. In other words, these false teachers who are coming in, you don't need these people.

John is speaking into the specific situation and saying, reject this teaching. You have the Gospel, go on in the Gospel and be clear about the Gospel. He calls them liars and he recognises them as anti-Christ.

So it's as strong as that and it's as important as that. In speaking about the anointing, he talks about how they've received the Gospel.

There's also this hint, we go back again to John's Gospel, about the Holy Spirit and the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers. Let me just read one more verse again from John's Gospel. In John chapter 14, John verse 26, Jesus says, in verse 25, I have spoken while still with you, but the Counselor of the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.

Now where to keep in step with the Holy Spirit? Because He's the one who teaches us and the one who guides us. So if we let everything else get in the way, if we let the world and desires for the world and all these other things that we spoke about earlier, if we let all that stack up in front of us and block out the Spirit's guidance as we listen to Him in prayer and as we read the Word and as we just spend less and less time listening to God and more and more time listening to the world, then we will struggle to be led by the Spirit and to follow the Lord.

[27 : 02] And it will do us damage in our souls and it will do us harm. So this is a passage of warning, but it's not about being negative because what John wants for the Christians is that they know the love of God.

He wants them to know how much their Lord has done for them and He wants them to walk in that light and to know fellowship with God.

If I go back to the first chapter, He says in verse 4 of the first chapter, we write this to make our joy complete because in knowing, in having a clear vision of the Lord and in walking in a daily basis, knowing His love and keeping in step with the Spirit and putting off the things of the world which take us away from Him, then we have joy in the Lord.

That's how we have joy in the Lord as we keep in step and as we walk. So there are these two sides, the general direction of our hearts and our affections and what we want in life.

And the specific challenge to keep a clear view of Jesus is not to let anybody change that or to distract us from who Jesus is and who the Bible presents Him to be.

[28 : 31] Just in finishing, what do we take from this? Think about God and all that God has done for you. The Trinity, Father, Son and Spirit are at work for your salvation.

God's desire is that you can know His truth and go home tonight saved, rejoicing that you have received from Him and that you have had your sins forgiven and that you can go home forgiven.

The Trinity is at work in you being saved. The desire of God is that His people know Him. So God has always longed and wanted for His people to recognize His call and to follow Him.

God's desire was that His people would respond to Him. And so He has been at work and He sent His Son and the Son came and was supported by the Spirit throughout His ministry and as He went through that, hugely, costly sacrifice on the cross.

He was so at work so that we could be saved. But also God supports us. So He doesn't say, I just leave you alone.

[29 : 52] He says, Jesus says to His followers, I will send another counselor to be with you. I'll send the Holy Spirit to teach you and to keep you in the way so that you can know my ways for you.

So please see what the Lord wants for you. He wants you to know Him and it's right for us to recognize all that He has done for us and all that He wants for us.

And then how do we respond? Well, as John says here, we're to be alert and we're to keep watch. Because what God wants for us in the Gospel and in His salvation is so worth protecting.

He says that everything else is passing away. He speaks about that quite often. Everything else is passing away. It's so transient. And we may think it's the most important thing and it will last forever, but it's passing.

But you have eternal life in Jesus. You have eternal life and you have fellowship with Him. And so we're to be alert. We're to be alert individually and we're to be alert as a fellowship, as we support and as we protect each other and as we speak the Gospel to each other.

[31 : 02] And so all of us in the different walks of life, as it were, those of us who are students, who are surrounded by so many new experiences and pressures in different ways, and those of us who are working and in business and who are faced with the way the world works and all the pressures you have in business and everything else.

Those of you who are travelling, who are on holiday, those of you who feel like you're in the prime of life and for whom the world is just like endless possibility and endless fun.

And those of you who are maybe going on in the way and you feel like life is long and life is hard and even like the Christian walk is hard, he says, in the light of all that the Lord has done for us and all that He has done to bless us in Jesus so that we can be saved, he says, be alert, watch out, and he says, remain in Him, remain in Jesus.

Stay fast in Jesus. He is your saviour and He is your light. Let's pray. Father, we face many troubles sometimes and we face danger and sometimes even though we don't recognise it and we can be so careless sometimes and we pray that you'd forgive us for that.

Thank you for the Gospel and help us to take care. Help us to be careful and to know that this is the most valuable thing to have the Gospel and to know your fellowship.

[32 : 48] To spend each day with God is the greatest thing for us. Help us to stay close to you. In Jesus name, amen.