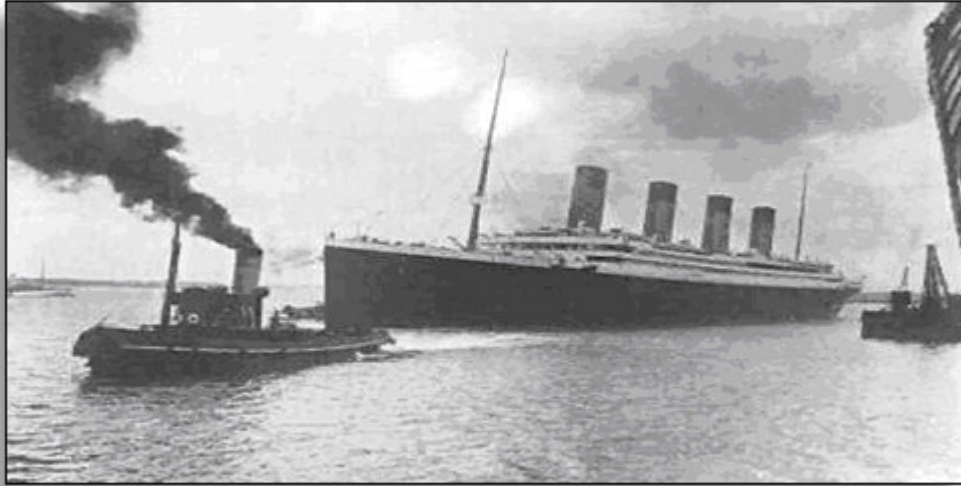


Titanic – The Journey of Life



Setting Sail

Although these events occurred nearly 100 years ago, most people will have heard of the sinking of the Titanic on her maiden voyage across the Atlantic Ocean. She was the largest ship of its day made by the White Star Company. It was extremely luxurious and on board there was a gymnasium, swimming pools, a squash court and Turkish baths, or saunas. The year was 1912 when the Titanic set sail from Southampton, England on Wednesday 10th April and her destination was New York, but probably the most famous maritime disaster prevented her from ever arriving. Because of an exhaustive enquiry following the disaster a wealth of information has been preserved for posterity.

The Titanic was claimed to be unsinkable and many have said that this proud boast was bound to provoke divine intervention. We may never know if that was the case this side of eternity, but what is remarkable is how much of the detail of this ill fated voyage serves as a spiritual analogy or parable, pointing out so many of the attitudes and the false confidence of those who live for this world only. In this article we will track the unfolding events of the short lived Titanic voyage and pick out several details to illustrate the danger and folly of neglecting and overlooking vital provision for our soul's needs. As she set sail we may picture ourselves setting out on life's journey, placing all our confidence and hope in this world and what it can do for us. We have hopes and plans but like the passengers on that great ship, we will probably never realise or achieve them, or if we do it will be at the expense of our ever living souls.

There was provided on the ship all that was possibly needed to keep the passengers and crew amused and fed and entertained. There were said to be at least 10 millionaires aboard including Bruce Ismay, Managing Director of White Star and Colonel Aster, reputed to be the richest man in the world. The ship was enormous, 882 feet long, 92.5 feet wide and 175 feet high, from the keel to the top of the funnels. There was a crew of 899 to attend to the needs of the passengers. She was powered by 2 enormous steam driven engines needing around the clock firing, fuelled from the 6000 tons of coal reserves needed for a single crossing. The passengers were very comfortably accommodated, at least in first and second class, those in the lower class, or steerage, had more basic cabins deeper within the ship. There were four electric lifts, quite remarkable for the time and a number of restaurants, an authentic Parisian Café with French waiters, a grand staircase and crystal chandeliers. There were 28 First Class State rooms and Suites decorated in the most splendid styles

of the day. Famously there was also a complete orchestra to entertain the diners and provide after dinner music.

Much more could be said about the sumptuous and plentiful provision on board, but these few details may suggest to us how we tend to view our own lives. We believe this world has all we need to make us happy, endless amusements and opportunities to satisfy our appetites, cravings and needs. We may not have experienced all of them yet, but we hope to. Even if we may never be rich or famous we admire and respect those who are and are happy just to be a part of this great world and pay tribute to its idols and stars. There were people on the ship from all walks of life and differing strata of society. Many were Irish emigrants setting out for a better life in America. There were a total of 1324 passengers besides the crew. They all represent the differing people in this world, in different strata of society, all travelling through time together with their hopes and dreams and fears, each having a different story to tell, but all essentially fellow travellers, just as we all are as we cross the sea of life, hoping to reach a certain destination, or perhaps preoccupied with the journey itself, unaware of where it will bring us to. In the main people drift through life giving little thought or attention to their deepest needs or even pausing to think where they are going, to heaven or to hell.

The Fateful Night

The Titanic steamed across fairly calm seas for 4 days before that fateful and eventful night, just as we set off in youth, full of expectation and hope; all may go fairly smoothly and calmly for a time but as the sparks fly upwards so we are bound to meet trouble. Our childhoods may seem relatively untroubled as we are unaware of the turmoil in the world around us, and before sin takes full charge of our lives, a time of innocence. The telegraph operators were kept busy transmitting messages from passengers and crew alike. People continued with their plans as the great ship ploughed across the dark deep sea, little thinking of its awesome power and the watery grave it would be to any who ventured out of the ship alone. We too travel through this life unaware that eternity surrounds us, at any moment ready to receive us like a vast ocean when the thread of life is cut.

Among the messages received by the operators were no less than seven warnings that there were icebergs in the region, significantly further south than was usual for the time of year, likely to be found in the shipping lanes. No panic or worry was felt on board the Titanic. After all she was said to be unsinkable, she was a beautifully designed and elegant floating world that could cope with anything that nature had to throw at her, or so the passengers and crew liked to think. We too receive warning messages throughout our lives. The wonders and beauty of the world around us speak of a God of awesome majesty, but are not moved; our consciences trouble and disturb us, but we ignore the warning voice; God's Word tells of a coming day of Judgement and a gracious Saviour; but we scoff at it and press on heedless into the uncertain night of life.

There were posted up in the crow's nest two men, named Fleet and Lee, but they could only peer ahead into the gloom as they braced themselves against the increasingly cold night, not. They constituted a kind of early warning system before the days of radar. They did not even have a pair of binoculars. They proved to be inadequate to avert catastrophe, just as men and women trust their own senses and instincts rather than submit to the God of Heaven and Earth for guidance through the perils of this short life. We place too much confidence in the wisdom of this world with all its proud boasts and claims instead of looking to the One who rules over all history. At around 11pm on the night of 14th April, the lookouts rang the warning gong and phoned the bridge to report "object dead ahead". A huge iceberg loomed out of the watery blackness, directly in the ship's path. The wheel was swung rapidly to the left and the 3 massive propellers put into reverse – but the thousands of tons of the vessel could not respond in time to avoid a collision.

So it is with sin, it is unavoidable, as the Scripture says, all we like sheep have gone astray, every one without fail will sin, break God's laws and live for themselves. It is in our path day by day, and we cannot avoid it, try as we might, great and small inevitably will encounter sin, again and again, and become habitual sinners. However, like the Titanic, we underestimate its effects. We think we can get away with it. There will be no long-term consequences or price to pay, no lasting damage. Besides, people cannot see into our hearts and minds, the inner thoughts and motivations are concealed deep within us.

This is perfectly shown in the Titanic's brush with the iceberg. The ship began to turn away from the berg, but not sufficiently to avoid the floating mountain of ice. She scraped past and as she did so great pieces of ice fractured off onto her decks. All that was felt by the passengers was a sort of shuddering or shaking for about ten seconds and then it was past, on she glided leaving the great frozen hulk in her wake. So it is with sin. It does not appear to harm us, or anyone else; God does not shout down from the heavens, we may proceed calmly on having suffered only a few pangs of conscience, a few alarm bells may have rung in our minds but then we appear to get away with it. We even make light of it, just as some of the passengers did as they played around with chunks of ice that had fallen onto the deck and walkway around the ship. Like sin, we only see the tip of the iceberg, it does not seem serious, but the larger part of what sin really is hidden, its ugliness and unreasonableness and offence to God, like the huge mass of the iceberg brooding hundreds of feet below the surface. They had no notion at all of the damage done as the ship seemed to proceed smoothly on, but below the waterline critical harm was inflicted.

Sin harms us in ways we do not readily appreciate or understand. It weakens our moral fibre and judgement. So much of the harm is within and like internal bleeding, various organs become impaired and less able to function. In time the effects of sin are seen outwardly in behaviour, speech and conduct, we answer increasingly to its dictates; the original creation has been spoiled and marred, just as the Titanic began to break down and die, very rapidly indeed.

Our Life in Peril

Captain Smith ordered that the watertight doors between the 16 compartments be shut immediately. He was not at first too worried because of the reputation of the ship to be unsinkable. He and Mr Andrews its designer, went below decks to inspect the damage. They saw that water was coming in at an alarming rate. The coalmen stoking the boilers were the first affected with water slopping around their feet as they worked. It was calculated that if four of the compartments were flooded the ship would survive, but they soon realized that the iceberg had buckled the steel plates comprising the hull of the ship a long way down its side and more than four compartments were compromised. The water was bound to spread, filling up one compartment after the other, and the ship was bound to sink. As with sin, once it has penetrated the human soul its fate is only a matter of time.

Many passengers had retired for the night. Others sat around in the dining halls and restaurants, playing cards, talking and generally relaxing on this trip of a lifetime, unconscious of the unfolding drama. It was calculated that they would remain afloat for another three hours before the incoming seawater swamped them. Captain Smith ordered the lifeboats to be readied and the operators sent out distress signals, appealing for help from any who may hear them on that cold dark night. We too should be earnest in prayer as our eternal souls are in peril as sin has its way with us and drags us ever downwards. Distress rockets were fired up hopefully to alert any other ship in the vicinity to their plight. In fact there was another ship within reach, its lights twinkled on the horizon, but inexplicably she did not respond to the rockets or radio distress calls. She was the Californian and the subsequent enquiry established that its telegraph operator was asleep – how different events may have been had he remained at his post. So it is with this world, when we are in real need no one hears us, the cry of our soul falls on deaf ears; none is qualified to give any meaningful help when we feel the ache within for truth and cleansing and salvation; when we sense the real inner condition as God sees us, when we sense that life is going disastrously wrong.

Many of the passengers and crew had no notion of how serious the situation was. The lights all remained on and the orchestra continued to play, only the discerning eye could detect the decks sloping slightly as the waters weighed down the bow. This mirrors our world and society in general. Things are not as they should be, sinful human nature has damaged and distorted every institution and facet of society, the decks of this world are listing badly but the music goes on. The bright lights still glitter and people pursue their dreams and goals not accepting or seeing that the foundations are slowly sinking. The first class passengers did not wish to go out onto the decks as ordered by the captain and crew. They refused to believe that the Titanic could or would sink. We too cannot bare the thought that our beloved world is fatally wounded and flawed, that there is ultimately no real prospect of world peace and harmony and personal reformation and real satisfaction, that rescue is the only real option.

Escape

Out of a total of 2235 souls on board 713 survived, 1522 perished in the cold sea. Without a single exception, only those who were in the lifeboats lived. In comparison to the ship itself the lifeboats were tiny, insignificant, overlooked. One can imagine passengers taking an evening walk along the promenades in the days before, looking out over the vast expanse of the ocean perhaps sensing their smallness, almost a sermon telling of a great Creator and His creation. Unnoticed would be the lifeboats nearby and probably not for a moment would any imagine that these and these alone would carry souls to safety on the dark cold sea. This perfectly illustrates the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. He alone can save individuals from Judgement and a lost eternity, having borne their sins on the cross of Calvary and taken the righteous anger and penalty from God the Father for those that would trust in Him. Such a message generally falls on deaf ears. The true church and the gospel are almost entirely overlooked and its message ignored, as the lifeboats were. But these relatively small lifeboats would assume greater significance than the greatest ship the world had ever seen. Christ, though despised and ignored is likewise the most significant and essential Person for the salvation of men and women. He alone can taste death for us and bring us safely to glory at last. Beside Him all the claims to glory and power of this world are like the crippled Titanic in her dying moments. All her splendour and engineering achievement were destined for the total obscurity and darkness of the ocean floor thousands of feet below.

At 00.20 hours on the morning of 15th April the first order to swing out the lifeboats was given. Due to confusion and the reluctance of passengers to enter the lifeboats First Officer Matlock struggled to fill "Number 7" lifeboat. The boat could have held 65 persons but only 24 got in. Astonishingly, even at this point many felt they were safer on the Titanic. This tragically misplaced faith is mirrored by men and women who have more confidence in this world than the promises of a gracious Saviour. Even though they may have heard the pleadings of God to save themselves, they cling to what they know, unable to accept that it is fading away before their very eyes. These deluded individuals were so close to safety but they could not see it. The idea of clambering out into the relatively small lifeboat and then lowered on ropes to the dark swell far below seemed folly when they had the great world of the stricken Titanic to keep them. So it is with faith in Christ. To the unspiritual mind the notion of trusting in what Jesus Christ did on the cross of Calvary and leaving this world behind to follow after Him appears foolish indeed. But that can only be if one does not see the predicament and danger of ones own soul awaiting certain death one day to face the righteous Judge of all the earth with no Saviour to represent them.

Left Behind

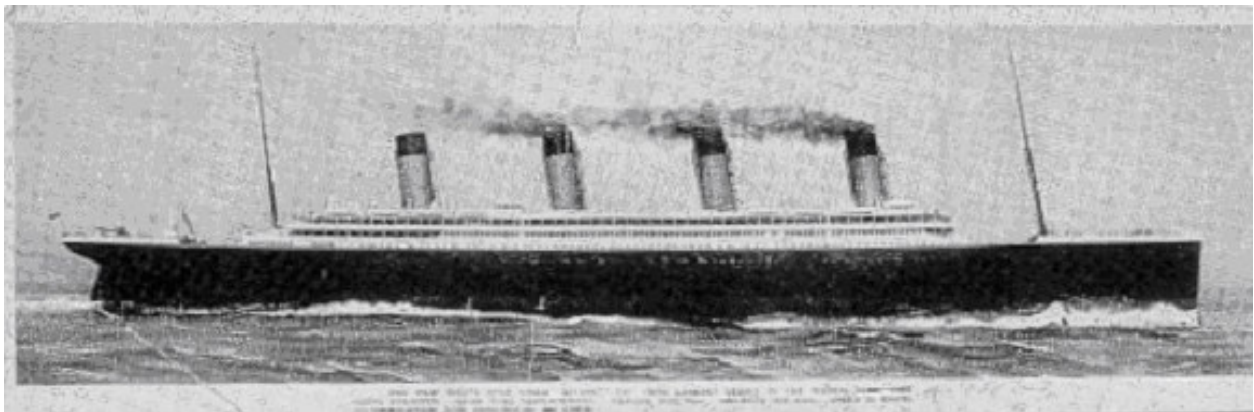
What became of those who could not, or would not get into the lifeboats? Many simply did not see the seriousness of the situation until it was too late. Some had no other hope, perhaps like Andrews, the ships designer, last seen in the smoking room apparently resigned to his fate. Many too will go down with this crippled and sin-sick world, unable or unwilling to see any alternative, having refused all offers of help from a God of tender mercy and compassion. The middle boats were better filled than those launched earlier, but the last few were not as there were not enough people found – in a similar way the gospel is preached today but there are relatively few who respond in a meaningful way, the opportunities are passing us by and for many they will leave it too late. This was the tragic fate of a large group of women and children from steerage, the lower class accommodation from deeper down in the ship. When they finally emerged on the decks they found that all the available boats had already gone. One can only imagine their hopeless despair as they realized, in their case through no fault of their own, that they had indeed arrived too late. This same terrible realization will sweep through countless people who will have also left the need of their eternal soul too late for any help; for whom there were always too many other distractions and pursuits to take all their time away, when they at last must venture into eternity guilty and alone.

Famously, the orchestra, or some members of it played on even when all hope was gone. We may presume this was a noble thing to do to calm the remaining doomed passengers and crew, but what a hopeless and sad scenario that would have presented on that cold night hundreds of miles out in the Atlantic. How misplaced and inappropriate too the bravado and confidence of this passing world, with people behaving as though they will live forever. People gladly take all comfort they can from this life, filling every hour and day with plans and experiences that only serve to silence and dull the warnings of conscience, refusing to contemplate their own futures when this life has sunk away.

Apart from the lifeboats there were also 3560 lifebelts and 48 lifebuoys. The British Board of Trade was satisfied that this was adequate provision in the unlikely event of sinking. The sadly misnamed lifebelts were wholly inadequate. They would have kept the wearers afloat but were no protection from the freezing cold sea, which claimed the lives of all who could only depend on them. Many of us too have a hopelessly deficient confidence where our soul is concerned. We may reject the only Saviour but instead have alternative plans. We may believe that we are not so bad and God is bound to be pleased with us, or we may hope that there will be no God to deal with at life's end, or that we are better than many others, or that God is not so holy and will after all accept everyone into His glorious kingdom. The cries of those perishing in the water were to haunt the survivors for years afterwards and there is a grave warning not to trust in our own righteousness or the provisions or ideas of man for our eternal security. At 2.20am the ship finally succumbed, sinking with a great rush of steam and sparks as her inner fires were finally quenched. Those still on board were thrown into the sea. Some managed to swim to lifeboats and clambered aboard but most perished in the icy water.

Dawn

The survivors had to wait in the freezing darkness on a clear star lit night until around 4.00am when the first rescue ship, the Carpathia arrived. They made a further search of the area but could find no more survivors, only numerous bodies. All the lifeboats rowed to the ship and their 711 half-frozen occupants were made welcome. They were fed and accommodated and with nothing more that could be done, they steamed on to New York where they arrived on Thursday 18th April. God's word makes it plain that only those that are in Christ will be carried through the darkness of death to the dawning of that eternal kingdom at last, to solid land where they will be forever secure and blessed.



Titanic – steaming across the Atlantic

The story of the Titanic was one of both folly and heroism and whilst we have every sympathy with those who suffered we cannot leave it without considering most seriously how she pictures our own life and situation.

Will you be among the saved on that great day, or will you cling to this world and perish when it is finally destroyed to usher in a new heavens and a new earth as the Bible teaches? You are invited to trust on Christ, to repent of all your sins and give your life to Him, the lifeboats are even now being lowered, will you get in, or will you remain on deck until the last opportunity has gone, while the band plays on until the very end?



Titanic Lifeboat