

Title: 03 - The Titanic (Tragedy Averted)

Text: Matthew 24:36-44/ Luke 12:16-21

(Thanks to Mrs. James Modlish for many of the ideas in this sermon)

There is no doubt the Titanic was a terrible tragedy. On the evening of Sunday April 14 1912 all seemed normal in the staterooms, in the lower steerage, in the dining rooms. Some passengers were asleep in their cabins, some were enjoying various activities provided by the company which owned the vessel. Others strolled around the ship enjoying the adventure.

But for two men it was a cold, yet clear night up in the crow's nest of the Titanic where they sat as watchmen for what had already been warned was in the area - ice. At about 11:40 p.m. the call came from the lookouts... "Iceberg ahead!" And the next hours have become a part of history. Over 1500 people lost their lives that night because a number of factors came together to create the tragedy that occurred.

Accident investigators will tell you that disasters like the Titanic are not just caused by one factor, but by a number of factors that come together to create the situation. There were design issues with the ship including the relative size of the rudder which made it difficult to turn and sheer bad luck.

However, there were also certain attitudes which if addressed could have averted the tragedy.

There was a false confidence.

The year 1912 was an era much like the one we are in today - it was marked with prosperity and technical advancement. People were motoring around in a new contraption called the "horseless carriage;" two insane brothers were even trying to fly! And in the midst of all this advancement a magnificent ship had been built; they named her the Titanic. This vessel was a structural marvel, an engineering feat, an object of great pride and beauty.

Titanic was about 300 m long ... the equivalent of almost three football fields; she had nine decks complete with appointments up to this time found only in first class hotels. James Cameron's movie gave you an accurate view of the lavishness of the interior of this ship. One anchor weighed 15 1/2 tons; one link in the chain of that anchor weighed 80 kg and the rivets which held the ship together contained 1200 tons of steel. Yet she was able to sail at speeds that rivalled any other ocean liner of that day. It had cost more than \$10 million in 1912 money to construct. She was a mammoth, magnificent vessel.

The people trusted in the reputation of the ship. The sheer splendour and massiveness of the vessel was greater than most had ever witnessed implied her invulnerability. Titanic was outfitted with a double bottom and sixteen watertight compartments, thus ensuring she could not possibly sink. Because it was believed to be unsinkable, many individuals decided against purchasing insurance to cover the loss of these treasures.

This quote has been attributed to several, but in the movie it is attributed to Rose's arrogant fiancée: "Not even God could sink this ship."

A man named Mike Rater, a lecturer at a Melbourne Bible College, tells the story that one day an elderly man came to him after he had preached a sermon when he mentioned the Titanic. The man said that his father had worked on the great ship. And he remembers his father came home from work one day highly agitated. It seems that his work mate while wielding the enormous steel plates that make up the boat had welded these words onto one of the plates: "I defy God to sink this ship." The man's father was very nervous that his workmate should make such a challenge to God. A nervousness that proved to be well founded.

You see humans have a habit of developing a certain prideful attitude. When we do something clever we are inclined to think that we can thumb our noses at God and say "well, what do you reckon about that?" We think that somehow God will be impressed or intimidated by our know-how or power. We think that we have effectively put God out of the picture through our technology or our wealth. We think that we have made ourselves safe from the things that can go wrong in life.

Jesus told a story which addressed this attitude. Luke 12:16-21:

^{Lk 12:16} And he told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. ¹⁷ He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.' ^{Lk 12:18} "Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. ¹⁹ And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.'" ^{Lk 12:20} "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?' ^{Lk 12:21} "This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God."

The farmer didn't *do* anything wrong necessarily. He was just building barns for himself. But clearly there was a wrong attitude. He put his faith in his barns rather than in God. By building a few barns he thought he could make himself totally self dependent. He could just take life easy, eat, drink and be merry. But we can never be self-sufficient, no matter how much we might like to think we are. No matter how many barns we have, when our life is required of us they will count for nothing.

Many of the people on the Titanic put their faith in the size of their ship and the technological know-how. They didn't even need lifeboats or have to worry about icebergs, or so many thought. They were so confident in the size and strength of their ship that they thought it was more powerful than God. But when that iceberg came along their self dependence was revealed for what it was - false security.

This is something we are all guilty of – putting trust in things rather than God. The people on board the Titanic were probably no more godless than the rest of us. But I guess in their case the foolishness was just more spectacular. It brought the folly of human thinking into sharp contrast. If you could put your faith in anything it was the Titanic, but one big hunk of ice proved spectacularly that such thinking was foolishness.

Most things that we think we can put our confidence in our unreliable. There is only one thing that we should put our confidence in - that is God. Superannuation, health insurance, staying fit, multiple airbags, bigger barns, even the Titanic, count for nothing when we hit the big iceberg. When things come to the crunch there is only one thing that we can trust in - that is God.

But there was a second wrong attitude on board the Titanic that night. There was a lack of watchfulness and preparedness. Not just the lookouts, but the people – they did not look towards their death – they believed in their own immortality.

Again Jesus spoke many times about this attitude. In Matthew 24:38-39: ³⁸ For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; ³⁹ and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.

Just like many of the people on the Titanic, the people in Noah's day were not watchful or prepared for what could, and did, happen. The message is basically "We don't know the hour when judgment will come - so be prepared. "

This is related to the attitude of overconfidence that many of us have. Because there have been such great advancements in medical science in the last few years we can begin to think that immortality is not far away. It gives us a false sense of security. But we are all just one test result from facing death. We are all one kerb away from stepping in front of a truck. We are all one street away from a fatal car accident. We don't like to think about these things, but they are the reality. In the midst of people eating and drinking and marrying the flood can come. In the midst of eating dinner in the luxurious dining rooms of the Titanic the end came. We need to be watchful. We need to be prepared.

The final wrong attitude that contributed to the tragedy of the Titanic was unheeded warnings.

The Captain of the Titanic had been given several warnings regarding the sighting of icebergs in the shipping lanes of the North Atlantic where they were sailing. He chose to ignore them and even ordered the crew to set an accelerated speed in order to arrive in New York ahead of schedule. In fact, five messages were telegraphed to the Titanic, and when the sixth warning, "Look out for icebergs" came in, the ship's operator wired back, "Shut up, I'm busy." The warning went out and it went unheeded.

The second unheeded warning was sounded when it became apparent the unsinkable was indeed sinking, and the lifeboats were readied for launching. Perhaps as a result of the arrogance of the architects and builders of this ship, there were not enough lifeboats for all those on board. But the real tragedy of the lifeboats was not only that there were not enough, but that those available were not filled to capacity. Only 750 were rescued on those boats which could have accommodated between 1100-1200. You see, even as the vessel was taking on water, some merely retreated to their cabins, not wanting to mess up their fine clothing and confident they were safe.

You have heard a warning today: those things we think we can depend on are not dependable. And, you are not immortal, the end can come any minute - so be prepared.

Warnings can sometimes be labelled "scaremongering". I guess we have all seen people going around proclaiming gloom and doom and we have rejected them. But the difference between scaremongering and a genuine warning is based upon what the evidence is. And I would suggest to you this morning the evidence that the things that we depend upon are not actually dependable and that we are not immortal, is quite conclusive. This is a warning not scaremongering. You can only depend on God and you are going to die. And so you need to be prepared. You need to get right with God by repenting of your sin and

accepting Jesus Christ as your saviour and Lord. You need to make sure that you have salvation in Jesus Christ and access to heaven.

The tragedy of heaven is that it can accommodate infinitely more than it will have. Sadly, many people who hear the message of Jesus will choose not to heed his warnings. They will choose to continue to live their life putting their confidence in things that are prone to fail. And they will not prepare themselves to face death, as Jesus warned us all to do. The result of that is that like the passengers of the Titanic they will slip of the surface of this earth into a Christless eternity.

In Halifax, Nova Scotia where many of the victims of this disaster are buried, a memorial to the Titanic has been built, and on that memorial are names of all the passengers listed in only two columns.

They aren't divided as rich like John Jacob Astor IV or poor as Frank Goldsmith who traveled in 3rd class;

They aren't divided as old as 70 year old Capt. Edward Crosby or young as Richard Becker, age one;

They aren't divided as man like Roderick Chisholm from Ireland or woman such as Mrs. James Joseph Brown of Denver, Colorado.

They simply listed as **SAVED OR LOST**, which is precisely how God looks at us.