

Titanic Lessons

Acts 16:31
August 18, 2024

Please open your Bibles today to Acts 16:31. We'll get there in a bit. 112 years ago this past spring, one of the most worst naval disasters of all time took place in the chilly waters of the North Atlantic. The brand new ship, Titanic was making its maiden voyage from Ireland to New York with 2240 people on board. They were planning to do it record time with what was considered an unsinkable ship. One of engineers even bragged that God Himself could not sink her! God didn't have to. The people in charge took care of that all by themselves.

You all are aware of what happened that night as it slammed into an iceberg and began to take on water. There are many spiritual lessons from this tragedy that we must not miss for they are evangelical lessons and carry eternal consequences. Our ship of humanity, upon which we **all** sail, slammed into an iceberg on our maiden voyage in the Garden of Eden and we have been taking on water ever since. It **will** go down. Sin will inevitably prove the undoing of all mankind. But in His grace and mercy, God has provided a lifeboat for each of us if we choose to get in.

The first lesson from that night involves John Harper. You didn't see him in the sensational and sensual movie years ago because John Harper was an evangelist. He was also a father raising his six year old daughter, Nana, by himself as his wife had died. He was on his way to America to hold a revival in Chicago. When he realized the ship was sinking, he took his precious Nana to a lifeboat and kissed her for the last time. Looking into her eyes, he told her she would see him again someday as the flares in the dark sky reflected in the tears on his face. He then turned and headed into the crowd on board the doomed ship. He began to share the gospel with anyone and everyone. He was seen kneeling on the deck praying with several men who were asking God to save them.

Later, as the huge ship began to tilt, Harper was seen making his way up the deck yelling, "Women, children and the **unsaved** into the lifeboats!" After the ship went down, he ended up in the icy waters swimming from person to person asking them if they were ready to enter eternity. He swam up to one man who had climbed up on a piece of debris. Harper asked him between breaths, "Are you saved?" The young man replied that he was not. Harper tried to lead him to Christ only to have the young man reject it. Harper then took off his own life jacket, threw it to him and said, "Here then, you need this more than I do..." and swam away to others. A few minutes later Harper swam back to this same man

and this time led him to salvation. 1,528 people went into the icy water that night. Only 6 were rescued by the lifeboats and one of those 6 was this young man.

Four years later he stood up at a survivors meeting and told in tears how Harper had led him to Jesus. He told also how after doing so, Harper tried to swim to others, yet because of the intense cold, had grown too weak. John Harper's last words before going under were a direct quote from Acts 16:31, our text today, "Believe on the Name of the Lord Jesus and you will be saved." Only God knows how many people are in heaven today because of John Harper that night.

We have people drowning all around us. Drowning in relationships, in sadness, in hopelessness, and in heartache. They may have already bobbed below the surface a time or two, but they're still hanging on, hoping for a lifeboat to come. Hoping for a rescuer, for a Savior. Will **you** be that rescuer? You can't be their savior, but you can introduce them to Him. Share with them Acts 16:31. Share Rom 10:13, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord **will** be saved." Invite them to pray with the Psalmist (69:14) Rescue me from the mire, do not let me sink. (Ps 70:1) Hasten, O God, to save me; O LORD, come quickly to help me.

Even after the ship hit the iceberg at 11:40pm and sank 2½ hours later at 2:20AM, the tragedies continued to unfold and so to our lessons. One of the saddest stories is the eventual deaths of 328 people who survived the sinking. Say 328. They had life jackets on and they were floating on top of the waves. But they froze to death in the 28 degree water because only 2 of the 18 lifeboats went back for survivors. When they finally did, it was too late for all but 6. The other 328 all died.

A lot has been made of the fact that there weren't enough lifeboats on board and there weren't. But the lifeboats they did have could have saved nearly 500 more people. One lifeboat meant to hold 40 people held only 12! The lifeboats weren't close to capacity but the people were afraid to go back for others. Say afraid. Afraid that they'd be swamped by too many people climbing in. Afraid that they'd be swept down in an undercurrent that didn't even exist. They were afraid and too concerned for their **own** safety to try to save someone else.

Can you see the parallel? We don't want to risk our **own** health to go on a mission trip. We don't want to risk **our** reputation to cross the street to talk to someone of questionable background. We don't want to risk **our** finances to feed or clothe or save someone. We don't want someone to think **we're** a

fanatic. We're afraid of undercurrents that doesn't even exist! And all the while people are perishing in the waters of life! Dying for hope, dying for someone to love them! To care about them! Not just to be put on church membership list or added to someone's program or resume, but that someone really, truly, genuinely cares about them! Finally, not being used anymore. Not being rejected anymore. Not being fooled or hurt anymore. But pulled out of the angry waves and saved.

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him **will not perish** but have everlasting life! People are perishing! We have a song in our hymnal called Rescue the Perishing. Sharing the Gospel is rescue work. It is literally snatching them in pity from hell and the grave as the song says. Not just in pity, but in love! Gal 1:3-4 says that Jesus Christ gave himself for our sins to **rescue** us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father. So God's will is for every soul to be rescued!

And He has commissioned our churches to be the lifeboats. Unfortunately, too often we're concerned that certain people might threaten our lifeboat. They might strain our resources or risk our safety. We cannot afford to hesitate! People are perishing! When the rescue ships arrived from Nova Scotia a day or so later they found those 328 bodies still floating in their life jackets on top of the water, stone cold dead. Not from drowning but from neglect! There was room for every single one of them in the lifeboats that night! But the people in them were too fearful and too selfish to make a difference.

90% of American Christians never talk about Jesus outside church, much less share the gospel. Why not? Say fear. Fear of what? Fear of rejection. Fear of not knowing what to say. Every rescuer that participates in a rescue is scared. Firefighters, EMTs, paramedics, etc. That's the nature of rescue. They are dangerous situations. Uncertain outcomes. You might be hurt yourself. But the whole philosophy of rescue is a greater fear of what will happen to others if we don't go! There is a cost of doing nothing and in this case that cost is eternal.

The early motto of the coast guard rescuers along the Atlantic coast was, "We have to go out, we don't have to come back!" We have to go out! We have to! We have no choice! Out of love and devotion and duty, not only to our fellow man, but to our Captain Jesus Himself, who came to earth on the greatest rescue mission of all! Was it risky for Him? It cost Him His life! But when He laid down His life for the Gospel, it was restored again and He has promised the same for each of us! Mark 8:35 For whoever wants to save his life **will** lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and **for the gospel** will save it.

Do you have a restless heart? A yearning to do more in your Christian life? That's God Himself stirring within you! It's His Holy Spirit trying to get you involved! Echoing His call to go into all the world and preach the gospel. To take the lifeboats out to the drowning. This is not just the pastor's job. It is every believer's job. God is calling each of us to get involved in this eternal work.

The Red Cross has trained people in First Aid and CPR for years because they know most people don't get hurt in a hospital. They get hurt out on back roads and in homes and factories. It's usually a while till they can get to a Dr. which is why basic training is so vital. Every Christian is a first responder. We should all know the basics of how to lead someone to Jesus. To stabilize them until they can get more help. To do that, we need to know some basic scriptures. We've got to get comfortable praying with someone. We don't have to map out everything in Revelation, but it's vital that we know John 3:16, Romans 10:9. It's Christianity 101. The basic basics. Does that mean that all the rest of the Bible doesn't matter? Absolutely not! It's all beautiful! But when someone is dying on the operating table, you don't dump the entire pharmacy on them all at once. You give them what they need to save them and the rest can follow later.

But what if they ask me something I don't know? Join the club! We don't and won't have all the answers! That's OK! But we should have some. That's why we have SS and BS and Apologetics speakers. That's why it's good to do personal study and reading. To practice with other believers and to roleplay. If they ask a hard question, you can dig and find out how to answer them. It can grow our own faith. The most important thing is to tell them what Jesus has done for you! Share some of these Titanic scriptures with them. 2 Sam 22:17 "He reached down from on high and took hold of me; he drew me out of deep waters. Ps 116:6 when I was in great need, he saved me. Ps 34:6 This poor man called, and the LORD heard him; he saved him out of all his troubles.

We **have** to go out. We don't have to come back. Some people in lifeboats say things like, "If they want to get saved bad enough, they can swim over to us." How stupid! They're frozen, cold, immobile, panic stricken. They can't swim! They can hardly move! We've got to go where they are! That's why we take the gospel out! Jesus didn't say, "Sit still and let em come." He said go and tell! That's why we send! And that's why we spend. Every dime we spend needs to advance the Kingdom of God not just in our churches but in our own checking accounts. People are not rescued at fire stations or rescue squad buildings. How many accidents happen there? They have to go to where the people are hurting. People don't come running up to the lifeguard chair and say here I am, save me. We have to go out! Out to our work, out to our play, out to

shop, out to eat, out to live, and yes, sometimes out for the sole purpose of reaching someone for Jesus. Sometimes people do come to church to get help, but that's often because someone has already given them first aid out there.

Another lesson from the Titanic involves the next closest ship that night, the Californian. The officers noticed distress signals from the *Titanic* and informed their Captain. There was a lot of discussion about them but in the end the *Californian* did not go check it out and didn't even wake up their wireless operator. If they had just done that, they would have at least gotten the SOS. They may have even gotten there in time to save some if not many. But they didn't. It's almost like they didn't care. They were competing cruise lines after all.

I wonder if **you** care? Are you awake? Is your heart within you sensitive to the needs of those around you? Can you sense when someone's in trouble? About to go under? Even if your hunch is wrong, it's worth a little time to ask, Is everything OK? Is there anything I can pray about? Are you trusting in the Lord to see you through? These are door opening statements that could give you an opportunity to share Jesus. But we've got to be watching and we've got to be ready and we've got to be willing. We may be rebuffed, insulted, hurt, persecuted, or even killed, but we have a duty to sound the alarm. We must go out.

One of the biggest tragedies of that April night in 1912 happened half a day before the ship ever hit the iceberg. Jack Phillips was the radioman on the Titanic. He got a message about a huge icefield long before the ship ever reached it. But he didn't deliver it. Why not? He set it aside because was too busy sending and receiving frivolous telegrams. Things that didn't matter. Temporary information while that one undelivered message cost over 1500 people their lives.

We're all like Jack Phillips, you and I. We've got God's warning, and His message of salvation right here, but we've laid it aside to pursue other things. You have the message that can save every person's soul where you work or go to school. Every soul in Woodstock and Shenandoah County. We have the message, but are we delivering it? Or are we too busy sending frivolous messages and doing meaningless stuff?

In Ezekiel 33, we are told that a city's watchman is not guilty if he sees trouble coming and warns the people of the city but they take no action. They may be destroyed, but he warned them and their blood is on their own heads. If however, the watchman

sees enemies approaching and fails to sound the alarm, their blood is on the watchman's head. Hell is yawning to receive those around us if we don't sound the alarm. One day, we'll be asked about the ones we could've told but didn't. Imagine walking into heaven and looking around and not seeing one of our friends and asking God, "Is so and so here?" And God will say, "Did you bring them?" We all want to think it's someone else's job. It's not, it's ours.

There's one final lesson I want to share from this disaster and it also involves that radioman, Jack Phillips. Just before he went to bed and just 40 minutes before the ship hit the iceberg, the radio operator of the *Californian* tried to warn the *Titanic* that there was ice ahead. But Jack Phillips cut him off and snapped back, "Shut up, I am busy."

How very tragic! We're so busy with other things. Things that don't matter! Temporary things that will all burn. So busy with things that are worthless! Down through history God has been telling us of His love and His wonderful salvation, and we radio back to Him, "Shut up, we're busy." Little knowing the disaster that awaits us ahead. In your own life perhaps you've heard God speaking to you before and perhaps again right now He's whispered that in your ear. He's radioing you a warning and an opportunity to avoid eternal disaster. Will you change your course? Or are you too busy. Too many other things. Too proud (couldn't be sunk), too hurried (records to set). Please respond to Jesus today.

Maybe you are floundering in the water. You're floating around but you don't know how much longer you can hold on. You've never called on Jesus to save you. The good news is that with Jesus, there's no shortage of salvation. There's enough seats on His lifeboat for every person. Climb on His boat today before you drown in life's wild sea. Ask Him to pull you out of the deep waters even as He has me. To rescue and to save you. As John Harper called out that icy night, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved." And if you're already in a lifeboat, ask the Lord who He wants you to rescue as we pray.