

A Titanic Question

John 14: 15-21

Rev. Philip Parker

August 4, 2024

In April of 1912 Reverend John Harper boarded the HMS Titanic, the world's largest steamship on its maiden voyage across the North Atlantic. He had been invited to preach a series of evangelistic sermons at the famous Moody Church in Chicago. A widower, he was traveling with his six year old daughter and his sister, who was the little girl's companion. On the night of the fourteenth, the unimaginable took place, the ship hit an iceberg and began to sink. As the passengers hurried to the lifeboats, John made sure that his daughter and sister were safely on board one of the boats. Realizing that there were not enough lifeboats for everyone to be saved, John turned his attention to those who would be left behind upon the doomed ship. He asked a titanic question, "Were they ready to meet their God?" As the Titanic slipped beneath the waves, John found himself in the icy water floating next to another passenger. He cried out to him, "Are you saved?" "No," the desperate man replied. "Believe on the Lord Jesus and you will be saved," John said. Knowing that he would not survive for very long, Reverend Harper gave his life vest to the man to whom he had witnessed before slipping beneath the waves. Later at a reunion of the survivors, this man testified to what had taken place on that night.

Whether we want to admit it or not, all of us are on board the Titanic. Sooner or later we will all meet the same fate as those who died on that ship so long ago. It's only a matter of time before our lives on earth come to an end. What then? That, indeed, is "A TITANIC QUESTION." Beginning this Sunday and continuing throughout the remaining Sundays in August, we're going to answer this question. We're going to answer it hopefully for ourselves as well as for those who live around us. We're going to uncover God's Plan of Salvation as it is recorded in the pages of the Bible and we're going to learn how we can share that plan with others. So, let's get started right away this morning. Along with this sermon and the messages to come, special materials have been prepared. They will be available in a printed format at church as well as online at our church's website under the heading of Discipleship. Please take advantage of them, reading, thinking and praying about their contents in the days to come. Just hearing a sermon will not be sufficient. If you really want to know how people are saved by God, including yourself and how you can share that wonderful message with others, you'll have to spend some time and effort to really understand what the Lord is telling us through His Word.

Here's the first thing you need to know. One day each and every one of us will sink beneath the waves of mortality. There are no exceptions. Our earthly lives will come to an end. So imagine for just a moment, right here

and right now, that you were standing before God and He asks you, "Why should I let you into my heaven?" That's a pretty good question that each of us will have to answer and it's a question that could be thrust upon us at any given moment. In my first church we held a homecoming every year on the first Sunday in November. After the morning worship service, we would have a covered dish luncheon in the fellowship hall. One of our older members, Bessie Steelman, wanted to hold our newborn baby girl. In a few moments she called my wife over and tenderly entrusted our daughter back into her care. Then she slumped over in her chair and stopped breathing. It happened just that quickly. One moment she was enjoying the homecoming festivities and the next moment she was gone. I knew, of course, where she had gone. She had been received into the arms of Jesus, because she was a believer. She had entrusted her life into the care of the Lord Jesus Christ. Unfortunately, that's not true of everyone.

So for ourselves as well as for others we need to know the answer to that question and we need to be willing and able to share it with others. If we are honest with ourselves, however, that question remains both unasked and unanswered most of the time. Why? There are a number of reasons. Some people mistakenly think that everyone goes to heaven. It's as simple as that! Theologically, this understanding of the hereafter is known as "Universal Salvation." Everyone gets in, even those who have lived horribly wicked and unrepentant lives on earth. How would you like to meet some of them while strolling down the streets of glory? Fortunately we don't have to worry because Jesus plainly states in John 14:6, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." Jesus is the gatekeeper of heaven. If you don't know Him, you can't get in. That's a constantly proclaimed doctrine throughout the pages of the Bible.

So what's holding us back? Why are we so hesitant to tell others about Jesus and how they can get into heaven? Three things. First, we don't know how to share the plan of God's salvation. We've never been taught how to share it in a clear and concise manner. Let me use myself as an illustration. I attended church as a child and young person, went to a Christian college and graduated from a theological seminary. Never once, however, did anyone explain or describe to me the plan of salvation. Yes, I was baptized as a child and I believed in Jesus. But, could I have told someone else how they could be saved. No way. It wasn't until I read the book, *Evangelism Explosion*, by Dr. D. James Kennedy, a Presbyterian pastor in Florida, that I learned how to lead others to Christ. What he taught me I want to share with you in these coming Sundays in August.

Second, even if we know God's plan of salvation, we're afraid to share it. We're afraid that we'll be rejected, made fun of, or goof up when we speak to someone about Jesus. We don't want to be embarrassed. We're shy and timid. The best we can do is invite that person to church. The pastor will

have to take over from there. Unfortunately, it doesn't work that way. Jesus said, "If anyone is ashamed of Me and My words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when He comes in His glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels" (Luke 9:26). In the days of the early church, the followers of Christ took those words seriously. Fleeing from Jerusalem during a time of persecution, Acts 8:4 declares, "Those who were scattered preached the word wherever they went." Those believers were not the leaders of the church, the Apostles. They were average, ordinary Christians like you and me. They had discovered something wonderful, deliverance from their sins and the promise of eternal life, and they were too excited to be quiet. They had to tell everyone what Christ had done for them and what He could do for them.

Here's the third reason why Christians are reluctant to share God's plan of salvation. It's the most sobering one of all. Christians don't share their faith because they have stopped caring. They've got their ticket to glory. Everyone else will have to get their own on their own. Call it apathy, call it a lack of empathy, call it anything you wish. Basically, we're telling those people, "I don't love you. I don't care what happens to you. It's not my problem." But it is, at least that's what Amy Carmichael believed. Born in Ireland in 1867 to a godly Presbyterian family, the eldest of seven children, she had a heart for God. At an early age she taught the Bible to working class girls in Belfast. Sensing God's call, she volunteered for missionary work, but was turned down because of ill health. Nevertheless, she made her way eventually to India, and spent the rest of her life in that country, rescuing girls who were being sold as temple prostitutes. Not only did she establish an orphanage for these girls, but was instrumental in leading thousands to Christ. What motivated her to undertake such selfless service? It was a dream, a dream of men, women and children stepping off into an abyss of eternal darkness with no one to warn them. Someone had to save them and she decided that someone was her, even though she was often ill and even bedfast during the later years of her life. She wrote, "If I have not compassion on my fellow-servant, even as my Lord had pity on me, then I know nothing of Calvary's love."

The Scripture this morning was taken from the gospel of John, chapter 14, verses 15-21. I could speak for a long time on the importance of these verses. Perhaps they will be the subject of a future sermon on another occasion. But this morning I want remind you of the singular reason why they were chosen for this message. When we share the plan of God's salvation with another individual, it's not something we do alone. The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of the risen Savior, is right there beside us, showing us what to say and what to do. He's with us just as surely as He was beside a man by the name of John Harper when he asked a Titanic Question on that fateful day, "Are you ready to meet your God?"