



'TITANIC'S VOICE'

The Witness of John Harper

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Pastor John Harper (left). He was the son of a draper, born in Houston, Renfrewshire on 29th May 1872

TITANIC is a name now shared globally. I recall as a child my grandmother telling me the story of 'the ship with the four funnels' that used to 'dress' the skyline of the coast of Northern Ireland on her 'test runs' – what she didn't realize was that one of the 'test runs' was Titanic making her way to Southampton.

Impressive and huge she was aptly named. My grandmother however was not taken with the size of the ship, nor even the craftsmanship but was more taken by and pondered on the tragic loss of life that would continue to penetrate generations to come...and she recalled how the last hymn sung on board was 'Nearer thy God to thee'...I never forgot this and as a child I was impressed by this amazing story about the biggest ship ever built, the opulence, the craftsmanship and the tragedy. Even by today's standard Titanic's loss was as the ship – huge.

John Harper was the son of a draper, born in Houston, Renfrewshire on 29th May 1872. He was brought up in a Christian home and was well educated. At the age of fourteen, he personally accepted Christ as his Lord and savior. He left school the same year and he worked first as a trainee gardener, then in a carpet factory, and later in a paper mill. He had the call to become a preacher at age 18 years and this obedience and tenacity would stand him in good stead in the

greatest test of his life which was just up ahead...His first position was In 1897, he became the first pastor of Paisley Road Baptist Church in Glasgow, Scotland. Under his care, the church quickly grew from 25 members to over 500 and soon moved to a new location on Plantation Street. In 1922, it moved into its present building on Craigiehall Street and was renamed Harper Memorial Baptist Church in his honor-

Harper was 39 and a widower with a six-year-old daughter, Annie Jessie (Nana), and pastor of Walworth Road Baptist Church in London at the time he boarded the Titanic. He was traveling with his daughter and niece Jessie W. Leitch to Chicago to preach for several weeks at the Moody Church, where he had been guest minister the previous fall.

On the night of April 14, 1912, and the first warning rang out, Harper wasted no time in getting his daughter, Nana, to an upper deck captain with instructions to get her in a lifeboat. She did survive, and returned to Scotland where she grew up and married a minister. Just before the accident John Harper was seen on the deck of the ship, leaning against a rail, he was sharing Christ with one of the passengers and this indeed would become his legacy and bearing witness to the truth on one of the most horrendous nights in history but for John Harper people may not have been comforted by the Word of God and gained salvation through the strength of faith that John Harper was portraying.

One account given indicates John Harper asked one man "Has your Soul been Saved" and upon the negative response he gave the man his life vest. The man survived to tell the story of John Harper – what a testimony! From that moment on John Harper's ministry began and he began to preach to the passengers on the doomed liner. He was heard to urge the women, children, and unsaved to go to the lifeboats.

As Titanic creaked and groaned into the ocean succumbing to the weight of the water John Harper jumped into the water. Some who survived told that Harper continued to preach the Word to the end (Acts 16:31), first aboard the sinking ship and then afterward converting those in the freezing water before dying in it himself.

A year or more after the sinking of the Titanic, a young man testified of how he had met the passionate preacher in the waters. As people were screaming and dying, he saw John Harper drifting near him. Harper cried out, "Man, are you saved?" The young man knew he was in no condition to meet his Maker, and answered sadly, "No." Harper immediately replied with Scripture: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."

After that they were separated, and Harper disappeared into the darkness. But as God's mercy would have it, within a short time they came within each other's sight once again. Again Harper asked the question that he had asked in various forms countless times throughout his years of service to His Lord: "Are you saved?" Once again the answer was given in the negative. Again Harper cried out, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."

John Harper succumbed to the freezing waters shortly after that. As best as anyone can tell, those were his last words. The young man, however, floating on a spar of the ship, was eventually picked up by one of the lifeboats and rescued by the Carpathia. He testified later: "There, two miles above the ocean floor, I did believe on the Lord Jesus Christ for my salvation. I was John Harper's last convert."

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