

WHICH LIST ARE YOU ON?

Michael W. Poole

JUST sixty years ago last April a crowd of people stood cheering and waving at Southampton docks. They were saying goodbye to the liner that was the pride of British shipbuilding, as she steamed out of port on her maiden voyage. Had they but known it, her first voyage was also to be her last. The *Titanic*, for that was her name, was nearly nine hundred feet long and her gross tonnage of over forty-six thousand made her the longest liner afloat. Each of her steel plates measured six feet by thirty feet, and she was built with a double bottom for strength and safety. In the unlikely event of an accident, even if a quarter of her sixteen watertight compartments were flooded, she would still remain afloat. By simply operating a switch on the bridge, the captain could close all of the massive watertight doors by remote control. As an extra precaution, should he fail to do so, any rising water would lift some floats and cause the doors to close automatically. The *Titanic* was, it seemed, virtually unsinkable.

But the seemingly impossible happened.

The night of April 14th was clear and cold. Beneath the stars the sea lay as calm as a millpond. Ablaze with lights from stem to stern, the *Titanic* sped through the darkness. Honour was at stake. How soon could New York be reached? Could the maiden voyage be a record-breaking one? The ship was in a festive mood. Against a background of music and laughter, powerful turbines thrust the gigantic liner through the black, icy waters of the Atlantic.

A slight shudder in the ship just after half-past eleven, went almost unnoticed by most of the [118/119]passengers. Down in the well of the ship, however, the grim truth was all too obvious. *Titanic* had struck an iceberg. Floating almost totally submerged beneath the dark waters, the iceberg had torn open the double bottom of the vast liner from the bows to the engine room -- a breach of over three hundred feet.

The story of the next two and a half hours makes grim reading. There were not enough life boats, and there were delays in the arrival of rescue ships. Finally, just

before half-past two, her stern now vertical, *Titanic* slid beneath the waves to begin her long descent to the ocean floor two miles below. A report was entitled 'Death the Divider' and under this title there were two columns, one headed 'Saved' and the other 'Lost'. Listed under the saved were the names of sixteen wives whose husbands were listed as lost.

'Women and children first' is the tradition of the sea, and highlighted against the stark tragedy of that night were countless acts of devotion and heroism. There was the wireless operator who stayed at his post till the last, and the band which played 'Nearer my God, to Thee' as the ship went down. There was the lady who gave her place in a lifeboat in order that a mother might be saved with her child, and there were the men who bravely swam off into the darkness to die rather than risk sinking the already overloaded lifeboats. The words once spoken by the Lord Jesus apply so aptly to that night, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends". Man was made in the image of God, and although he is sinful, he still bears something of the noble stamp of his God.

When Jesus spoke these words, however, He was explaining to His followers what He was about to do. He said, likening men to sheep, "I lay down my life for the sheep", and again, "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep". Only His death was different; it was not just in order that another person might enjoy life on earth for a few more years, but that all men who would accept His forgiveness might enjoy eternal life now and for ever. There is a list of 'Saved' and 'Lost' for eternity, too. There is a "Lamb's book of life" in which the names of all who have trusted in Christ are written. God would like you to let Him write your name in it, for He wants "all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth"!

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