

UNLIKELY HERO

— by Paul Wilkinson —

John Harper [a Baptist pastor from Glasgow, Scotland] had...spent three months ministering at Moody Church in Chicago, during which time the church had experienced “one of the most wonderful revivals in its history.” He had not been back in Britain long, however, when he was asked to return and continue his ministry. Harper quickly made arrangements for himself and his six-year-old daughter, Nana, to travel back to America on board the *Lusitania* but decided to delay their departure for one week so that they could sail on a new ship which was about to make its maiden voyage—the *Titanic*.

The *Titanic* struck an iceberg at 11:40 pm on April 14, 1912. As the call was issued for passengers to vacate their cabins, Harper wrapped his daughter in a blanket, told her that she would see him again one day, and passed her to one of the crewmen. After watching her safely board one of the lifeboats, he removed his life-jacket and gave it to one of the other passengers. One survivor distinctly remembered hearing him shout, “Women, children, and the unsaved into the lifeboats!” Harper then ran along the decks pleading with people to turn to Christ, and, with the ship sinking, he called upon the *Titanic*’s orchestra to play, “Nearer, My God, to Thee.” Gathering people around him on deck, he then knelt down, and “with holy joy in his face,” raised his arms in prayer. As the ship began to lurch, he jumped into the icy waters and swam frantically to all he could reach, beseeching them to turn to the Lord Jesus and be saved. Finally, as hypothermia set in, John Harper sank beneath the waters and



passed into the Lord’s presence. He was 39.

Four years later, a young Scotsman by the name of Aguilla Webb stood up in a meeting in Hamilton, Canada, and gave the following testimony:

I am a survivor of the *Titanic*. When I was drifting alone on a spar that awful night, the tide brought Mr. John Harper of Glasgow, also on a piece of the wreck, near me. “Man,” he said, “are you saved?” “No,” I said, “I am not.” He replied, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.” The waves bore him away; but, strange to say, brought him back a little later, and he said, “Are you saved now?” “No,” I said, “I cannot honestly say that I am.” He said again, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved,” and shortly after, he went down; and there, alone in the night, and with two miles of water under me, I believed. I am John Harper’s last convert.

In a tribute to Harper, which was published in 1912 under the heading, “The Three Themes of a Hero,” William Andrew of Glasgow noted that the three themes of John Harper’s preaching had been “the Cross of Christ, God’s marvelous grace to man, and the soon coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

1. George Harper, “My Brother As I Knew Him,” in Moody Adams, *The Titanic’s Last Hero* (Belfast: Ambassador, 1998), 55, cited in Wilkinson, “You Shall Be My Witnesses.”
2. See, for example, “A True Story from the *Titanic*,” <http://www.corkfpc.com/14.html>, cited in Wilkinson.

ALSO FROM PAUL WILKINSON:

Though unrelated to the *Titanic* account above, we are pleased to offer and recommend Paul Wilkinson’s excellent book, *For Zion’s Sake*.



For Zion’s Sake

Wilkinson—Christian Zionism has been described by Hamas as “the greatest danger to world truth, justice, and peace,” and by the church as “a powerful force” that “fuels the Arab-Israeli conflict.” How sustainable are these charges, and is there a case to answer? By locating Christian Zionism firmly within the evangelical tradition, Paul Wilkinson takes issue with those who have portrayed it as a “totally unbiblical menace” and as the “road map to Armageddon.” Charting in detail its origins and historical development, he argues that Christian Zionism lays the biblical foundation for Israel’s restoration and the return of Christ. Paternoster, 308 pp.

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