

## Chapter 1

### The Rumbblings

She was the largest and most spectacular vessel ever built. The immensity of this ship was nearly inconceivable to the 15,000 shipyard workers who riveted, forged, and hammered her into being. It took the strength of three men to budge a single nut for the connecting engine bolts. Her parts and plating came from around the globe: steel from Scotland; teak from Siam; and fabrics from Holland. She was the cosmopolitan jewel of the seas.

She was dubbed “the last word in ocean travel.” In the words of Thomas Andrews, Titanic’s designer, she was “as nearly perfect as human brains can make her.” Her strength and classic beauty astounded the world.

To watch her historic launch, more than a hundred thousand spectators crowded the shipyard and clung to nearby rooftops, masts, and river banks, straining to see the most gargantuan ship ever released into the water. On April 10, 1912, the Titanic departed her Southampton mooring on time at 12:15 p.m. Nobody guessed that her rendezvous with history was a mere ninety-five hours away.

On April 14 the captain received numerous warnings of icebergs lurking in the ship’s path. Over and over, from different ships all day long, the signal came: Be careful, ice ahead. Captain Smith casually passed along the warnings to the presiding officer, J. Bruce Ismay. Someone commented to Ismay, “I suppose you are going to slow her down,” since they were approaching ice.

” ‘Oh, no,’ ” Ismay replied. ” ‘On the contrary, we are going to let her run a great deal faster and get out of it.’ ”<sup>1</sup>

At 11:40 p.m., Frederick Fleet stood in the crow’s nest. He was alarmed by a strange haze he noticed directly ahead on the horizon. He struggled to make out what it was with his bare eyes (for some reason the binoculars that should have been in the crow’s nest were missing). Suddenly, Fleet frantically jerked the warning bell three times and telephoned the bridge, sputtering, “Iceberg, right ahead.”

The Titanic was hurtling directly toward a pinnacled black mass of ice. Fleet and his partner steeled themselves for a disastrous collision. A spur of ice jutting from the iceberg below the water-line scraped along the Titanic’s underside for 300 feet, damaging the ship’s inch-thick

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plates in at least five of her watertight compartments. The icy water spilled from one compartment to the next, filling up like sections of an ice-cube tray.

Meanwhile, the passengers were oblivious to the impending disaster. Gus Stanbrook was sleeping at the time when his roommate shook him and said, ““Come on, Gus, get a life belt and go to your boat, she’s sinking.”“<sup>2</sup> Gus started laughing and went back to sleep.

Seaman Joseph Scarrett had been enjoying a smoke when the ship started shaking. He later recounted the story by saying: “We all rushed on deck to see what was the matter. We found the ship had struck an iceberg as there was a large quantity of ice... on the starboard side of the foredeck. We did not think it very serious so we went below again, cursing the iceberg for disturbing us.”<sup>3</sup>

The book *Titanic* offers this chilling account:

Outside, several steerage passengers were entertaining themselves by kicking around the ice that had dropped onto the deck, and some first-class passengers laughingly arranged snowball matches for the next morning. Three French passengers had been playing bridge with a Mr. Smith from Philadelphia when a “crunching mass of ice packed up against the portholes.” Immediately after the collision, professional gamblers were gathering up their cards, which had fallen to the floor, and were dealing hands again. In the smoking room, one of the card players pointed to his whisky glass and jokingly suggested that someone run out on deck for ice to chill his drink.<sup>4</sup>

Wallace Hartley, the *Titanic*’s bandleader, continued to conduct his musicians as the ship began to sink. As the deck heaved higher and higher into the air, Hartley released his fellow musicians, but none of them wanted to leave. Instead they played a final, solemn tune as the water rolled up the deck. Some remembered the song to be “Nearer My God to Thee.” All of the musicians died.

As the great *Titanic* sank, Colonel Gracie found himself trapped inside a whirlpool and dragged far down in the knifelike, twenty-eight-degree water. When he surfaced, he remembered, ” ‘I could see no *Titanic* in sight.... There was only a slight gulp behind me as the water closed over her.’ ” Spotting an overturned collapsible boat on which more than a dozen other men hung for life, Gracie pulled himself aboard. Soon there were thirty others aboard the partly submerged boat, including a woman, third-class passenger Mrs. Rosa Abbott. She had been thrown into the sea with both of her sons. She fought her way onto the capsized craft. I say “fought her way” because those on

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board used oars to strike swimmers who attempted to climb on. Both of her boys drowned. Gracie recalled, “One more clambering aboard would have swamped our already crowded craft.”<sup>5</sup>

When the nightmare was over, there were 705 survivors; 1,523 people were swallowed by the frigid sea.

Titanic rumblings

Seems surreal, doesn't it? And yet I wonder if the story of the Titanic is not a parable of our world today. Could it be that we are actors in the sequel - the cataclysmic, grand finale that will climax with the second coming of Jesus?

It seems that people are casually sleeping and playing cards and drinking as if the ship could never sink. But, as James Cameron, director of the Hollywood blockbuster movie, said, “The story of the Titanic is that the inconceivable can happen.”

It may seem impossible that the Lord will come, but let us never forget the lesson of the Titanic: The inconceivable can happen. And in the case of its sequel - the destruction of this world - the inconceivable will happen. Like the Titanic, it will catch people by surprise. Many will be unprepared.

That's why the apostle Peter offers this warning to us: “But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare” (2 Peter 3:10).

The summer of my senior year in college, I got a taste of what it's like to be caught by surprise. A professor in the physical education department phoned me. “Hey, Karl,” Coach Windemuth said, “how would you like to live in our house while we go on a six-week vacation to California?”

“Sure!” I said. “I'd love to.”

The morning of their departure he briefed me on the short To Do list that was displayed under a magnet on the refrigerator: “Water the plants, mow the yard, and feed the cat. Call us if you have any questions.”

“Don't worry about anything. I've got it under control,” I said with a grin as they rolled out of the driveway.

“Thanks, Karl! Oh, and just make yourself at home.”

I interpreted Coach's parting words as an invitation to do whatever I wanted. So I pilfered the cupboards for food, I rummaged through the video box for some good flicks, I slept in each of the six beds

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(How else would I know which one was the most comfortable?), and I invited lots of students over for a perpetual party. Let's just say that I was making myself "at home."

After five weeks, the living room was a maze of empty pizza boxes and dirty dishes. The lawn looked like a rainforest. And the cat resembled an X-ray. In general, the place looked like Hurricane Iniki and Hurricane Andrew got married there. I reckon it could have qualified as a national wildlife preserve.

Now it's not that I was planning to leave the place in such disarray. I just figured I had plenty of time. I slated the entire weekend before Windemuth's Monday afternoon return as Operation Cleanup.

On Friday morning I invaded Costco to get an arsenal of cleaning supplies to erase six weeks of partying. When I got back to their house, my heart stopped. As I peered over the waist-high grass I saw the Windemuths' Volkswagen Rabbit parked in their driveway. I wondered, How could this be? They're in California. I pondered purchasing a one-way ticket to Botswana. "Surprise!"

"Um, ah, yeah, well, ah, welcome back. Surprise! Listen, I'm really sorry about the mess..."

"Hey, not to worry. We should have called to let you know our revised plans."

Had I only known when they were coming home, I would have been ready. If only...

The same excuse will echo through the multitudes of unprepared people at the Second Coming. "If only we had known, Jesus, when You were coming..." That's why the clarion cry of Scripture warns us to "keep watch." Ironically, the warning sirens are wailing all around us. The titanic rumblings are deafening. Listen to them.

### 1. Economic Rumblings.

I'm no economist, but I sense the rumblings of an impending economic collapse. Don't you? Writing in *Time* magazine, Craig Besinque says it well: "The world economy is so rickety that only a cell-phone tag team of financial sorcerers can fend off massive financial meltdown."<sup>6</sup>

Logging on to the CNN Money Web site this morning I was greeted with this headline: "Consumers' views worsen." According to the article, "Consumer confidence worsened... as more Americans became pessimistic about the nation's economy, according to an ABC News/Money magazine poll."<sup>7</sup>

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Another headline I clipped recently from USA TODAY offers this ominous warning: “Sony’s top executive warns that Japan’s economy is near collapse.” According to the article, “Sony chief Norio Ohga warned Thurs day that Japan’s economy was close to collapse and could drag the rest of the world down with it.”

Tracing the course of the national debt signals more trouble. In 1974, the United States’ national debt was \$483 billion. In 1984 it was \$1.56 trillion. In 1994 it was \$4.67 trillion. Checking the U.S. National Debt Clock this morning, I found that it displayed a current debt of \$6.08 trillion. That translates to each U.S. citizen’s debt at \$21,174. Most unsettling is the fact that the National Debt has continued to increase an average of \$1.1 billion per day since September 28, 2001.

Christian financial expert Larry Burkett writes:

Not only is [the federal deficit] out of control, there appears to be no rational voice in the capitol trying to straighten out the mess. I can’t emphasize too strongly that the federal debt (as well as the private sector debt) can and will destroy our economy.... There never has been anything approaching this level of debt funding in the history of mankind in so short a period of time, even on a percentage basis.<sup>8</sup>

While I’m no money guru, I do know that you cannot indefinitely continue to spend more money than you make. Eventually, it will spell economic collapse.

I was reminded of this financial principle recently at a B. Dalton bookstore in Seattle. Noticing the cashier’s convivial mood, I commented, “My, you sure seem happy today.”

“I should be,” she said. “I just won two thousand dollars. I can’t wait to get off work to go spend it.”

“Wow! That’s great!” I said. “Did you win the lottery?”

“No, I won it through my credit card company.”

“Credit card company? Did they randomly select your number or something?”

“Not exactly. They increased my credit limit.”

“Huh?”

“They upped my credit limit.”

“So do you have to pay it back?”

“Well, yeah, I guess eventually. But all my other credit cards are maxed out, so I’m going to go spend the two thousand today.”

I thought, Lady! You’re lucky you’re not my wife. It doesn’t take a degree from Harvard to see she’s heading for disaster. You can’t keep

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spending money you don't have. Some day the bills will come due. Yet the government has been sliding down that track for decades.

Clearly, the rumblings are rampant. Next, consider the environment.

### 2. Environmental Rumblings.

I'm no environmental expert, but I sense the rumblings of an impending environmental collapse. Don't you?

Take, for example, the Earth Day 2000 30-Year Report Card published by World Watch magazine. In 1992, 3,500 scientists from around the world signed a World Scientists Warning to Humanity that stated:

Our massive tampering with the world's interdependent web of life - coupled with the environmental damage inflicted by deforestation, species loss, and climate change - could trigger widespread adverse effects, including unpredictable collapses of critical biological systems whose interactions and dynamics we only imperfectly understand.<sup>9</sup>

Keep in mind this statement did not come from some naked environmentalist handcuffed to a spotted owl; rather it is a warning issued by the world's brightest scientists. The report cites numerous reasons for concern:

- Most of the world's great biological systems are in a state of collapse because we have logged, trawled, or cultivated them to maximize short-term production. Plant and animal species are going extinct at the fastest rate ever.
- The world's existing human population is already three times as great as the planet's long-term carrying capacity if all people seek a level of affluence comparable to that currently enjoyed in, say, Sweden.
- We have carved two giant holes in the ozone layer, increasing the exposure of people, plants, and animals to damaging radiation from the sun.
- We have raised the temperature of the entire planet and set in motion a series of inexorable forces that will raise it a lot more before we can bring it back into equilibrium - no matter what we do.<sup>10</sup>

The U. S. Environmental Protection Agency reports that "over 160 million tons of pollution are emitted into the air each year in the United States, and approximately 121 million people live in areas where monitored air was unhealthy because of high levels of the six principal air pollutants."<sup>11</sup>

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Meanwhile, environmental policies remain a low priority. Worldwatch Institute reports: “The growing number of international environmental treaties and other initiatives suffer from weak commitments and inadequate funding. The U.N. Environment Programme has struggled to maintain its annual budget of roughly \$100 million. At the same time, military expenditures by the world’s governments are running at more than \$2 billion a day.”<sup>12</sup>

Conservationist David Brower observes: “We’ve got to put back together, as well as we can, the things we took apart since the Industrial Revolution. It was a big party. Now the bills are coming in: global warming, acid rain, holes in the ozone layer, loss of species and loss of hope

.The last moment has arrived. As somebody said, The threat of being hanged gets one’s attention.’ “

I’m no expert on environmental matters, but the reports seem to suggest that an impending meltdown is imminent.

### 3. Sociological Rumbblings.

How should we interpret the sociological rumbblings? While I’m not a social worker or a sociologist, I can see how the moral and relational fabric in our society is tearing. It seems like the world is drifting toward a precipice of self-destruction. I’ve seen snapshots of the insanity.

A waterfall of crushed glass comes to mind. It was a lazy Sunday afternoon when a metal chair exploded through the large picture window next to me. Peering into the food courtyard at Brierwood Mall, I gawked at a gang fight unfolding before me.

The kids fighting looked as if they weren’t even old enough to shave. Yet the intensity of their crazed anger made my gut flinch. That’s because this wasn’t television. This wasn’t Keanu Reeves on the big screen. This was real blood, real knives, and real kids.

A curious mob circled the action. Nobody dared to venture into the fray, except for a thin grandma.

“For God’s sake,” she screamed as she tugged on the leather jacket of a boy who was mercilessly pounding on a limp body settled in a puddle of blood. “Stop, young man, stop! You’re going to kill him! Stop!”

Soon, the police arrived to arrest the troublemakers. The crowd dispersed. The janitor mopped up the mess. The maintenance man placed a sheet of plywood in the store window. And I sat, consumed in my thoughts.

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I thought of the promise in Isaiah 20:18. “‘Violence will not be heard again in your land, nor devastation or destruction within your borders; but you will call your walls salvation, and your gates praise’ ” (NASB). I wondered, What’s happening in our land? When will Jesus come and deliver us from the madness?

I reflected on a statement by Ellen White:

The youth generally are not educated to diligent habits. Cities and even country towns are becoming like Sodom and Gomorrah, and like the world in the days of Noah. The training of the youth in those days was after the same order as children are being educated and trained in this age, to love excitement, to glorify themselves, to follow the imagination of their own evil hearts. Now as then, depravity, cruelty, violence, and crime are the result.<sup>13</sup>

It occurred to me, in that context, that our world is a ticking time bomb. We’re in weeds. George Barna, CEO of an independent marketing research company, offers this perspective:

Moral anarchy has arrived and rules our culture today. The argument hinges on a substantial amount of attitudinal and behavioral evidence: record bankruptcy levels, frivolous lawsuits, the rapid growth of the pornography industry, highway speeding as the norm, income tax cheating, computer hacking and viruses, rising levels of white collar crime, rampant copyright violations (movies, books, recordings), terrorism and intimidation tactics, Net-based plagiarism, emotional comfort with lying and cheating, increasing rates of co-habitation and adultery, and so forth....

Millions of people’s faith activity is no longer affected by parameters such as church loyalty, respect for clergy, acceptance of absolutes, tolerance of Christianity, reverence for God, a desire to strive for personal holiness, sensitivity to theological heresy, and appreciation of tradition. The rejection of these elements has created a void that has been filled by the customized spirituality that lacks biblical moorings.<sup>14</sup>

Scanning today’s newspaper illustrates this. Stories of terrorism hog the headlines. Tucked in the corners of the paper are reports such as that of Louise Sullivan, the woman charged in the death of a six-month-old baby who died of shaken-baby syndrome. There’s also the story of the science teacher in Edinboro, Pennsylvania, who was shot at an after-school dance. The smallest print unveils the lineup for talk shows today. Jenny Jones is talking about successful drag queens.



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Oprah focuses on violently abusive husbands. Jerry Springer will serve up a discussion on lovers who reveal their infidelities.

Statistics show that we're paying a price for marinating our minds in godless gunk. Since 1960, the divorce rate has doubled, the number of single-parent households has tripled, couples living together out of wedlock have quadrupled, domestic violence has quadrupled, and teenage pregnancy in America is the highest of any Western nation.

We're a long way from Walton Mountain. When is it going to end? I'm not a sociologist, but I see the rupturing of virtues in our culture. I sense the titanic rumblings that speak to the fulfillment of the prophecy that the last days will be marked by "debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry" (1 Peter 4:3). The apostle Peter then concludes, "The end of all things is near" (1 Peter 4:7).

### Lifeboats

I don't mean to be an alarmist, but the ship is going down. So what can you do? It's obvious - if the ship is going down, you need to get in a lifeboat. Peter goes on to identify three lifeboats.

#### 1. The Lifeboat of Prayer.

Following the conclusion that the world is about to end, Peter summarizes what we need to be doing in light of the last days with the transitional word therefore. Look at the full verse: "The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray" (1 Peter 4:7).

While I may be clueless when it comes to fixing the economy or healing the environment or lowering the crime rate, I do know how to pray. Prayer is the practice of living in Christ.

Listen to Soren Kierkegaard:

The immediate person thinks and imagines that when he prays, the important thing, the thing he must concentrate upon, is that God should hear what he is praying for. And yet in the true, eternal sense it is just the reverse: the true relation in prayer is not when God hears what is prayed for, but when the person praying continues to pray until he is the one who hears, who hears what God wills. The immediate person uses many words and makes demands in his prayer; the true man of prayer only attends.

Mother Teresa once said: "Prayer enlarges the heart until it is capable of containing God's gift of himself."<sup>15</sup> No wonder that she would often spend hours in prayer. That's what we are called to be doing in light of the fact that the end of all things is near.

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News anchorman Dan Rather once asked Mother Teresa, “What do you say to God when you pray?”

“I listen,” said Mother Teresa.

“And what does God say to you?”

“He listens.”

Prayer, in its purest form, is simply being in the presence of Jesus. As we sense the titanic rumblings all around us, reminding us that the end of all things is near, what can we do? First, we can pray. That is, we can live in the presence of Jesus.

### 2. The Lifeboat of Love.

Notice the second lifeboat in the next verse: “Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins” (1 Peter 4:8).

As we wait for Jesus to come, we are called not only to be a community of prayer, but a community of love. The haunting words of this poem remind us of our calling:

Six humans trapped by happenstance, in bleak and bitter cold, each one possessed a stick of wood, or so the story’s told.

Their dying fire in need of logs, the first man held his back, for of the faces round the fire he noticed one was Black.

The next man looking ‘cross the way, saw one not of his church. And couldn’t bring himself to give the fire his stick of Birch.

The third one sat in tattered clothes; he gave his coat a hitch. Why should his log be put to use to warm the idle rich?

The rich man just sat back and thought of the wealth he had in store, and how to keep what he had earned from the lazy, shiftless poor.

The Black man’s face bespoke revenge as the fire passed from sight. For all he saw in his stick of wood was a chance to spite the White.

The last man of this forlorn group did naught except for gain, giving only to those who gave was how he played the game.

Their logs held tight in death’s still hand was proof of human sin, they did not die from the cold without - they died from the cold within.<sup>16</sup>

The ship is sinking. But those who perish in the final judgment will not die from the fire and brimstone that will rain down from heaven, but from cold and unloving hearts - hearts that were never transformed by the love of Jesus. So God calls us to get in the lifeboat of love and model His grace while we wait for Him.

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### 3. The Lifeboat of Service.

Finally, Peter calls us to serve. “Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms” (1 Peter 4:9, 10).

While we wait for Jesus to come, we are to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace. I can’t think of anything better to do while we’re waiting, can you?

An early morning jog cemented this conviction for me. It was like skinny-dipping in the Arctic. Jogging by Auburn Elementary School, I staggered like a drunk on ice. I set out to exercise my body but exercised my spiritual gift instead - eavesdropping.

Straining to hear above the searing wind, I slowed my gait as I approached the crosswalk. “Good morning, Jessica,” the boy greeted a girl. Decorated with a reflective vest four sizes too big, he valiantly waved his florescent orange flag to assure her safe passage.

Sliding by him, the girl replied, “Hey, Matthew. How are you?”  
“I’m about to freeze to death.”

It was her response that I loved most. I raced home to preserve her wisdom in my journal.

“Well,” she said, “if you freeze to death, at least you’d die in the service!”

In that moment it hit me. That’s how I’d like to die! Or if Jesus comes before I die, that’s what I hope He finds me doing: escorting a kid across the intersection, serenading the shut-ins, roofing a homeless shelter, listening to a hurting friend, buying groceries for an Alzheimer’s patient, or raking leaves for Grandma. That’s what God has called us to be about while we wait for His return. So go serve!

Clearly, there are specific things we ought to be doing while we wait for the Master to return. William Miller, the Adventist pioneer who erroneously interpreted Daniel 8:14 to mean Jesus would come on October 22, 1844, discovered this in his later years. Shortly before his death, he said to his friend Hendrix, “I now know when Jesus will come.”

“Really? You were quite wrong last time. Now when do you think Jesus will come?”

The aged Miller replied, “Jesus is going to come today, today, today... until He comes.”

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I, too, know when Jesus will come. He's coming today, so let's pray. He's coming today, so let's love. He's coming today, so let's serve. Today... until He comes.

1 Susan Wels, *Titanic: The Legacy of the World's Greatest Ocean Liner* (Tehabi Books, Inc. and Time-Life Books, 1997), 80.

2 Wels, 87.

3 Wels, 87

4 Wels, 88.

5 Wels, 103.

6 Craig Besinque, "Letters," *Time* (8 March 1999), 9.

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<[http://money.cnn.com/2002/06/05/news/economy/abc\\_money/index.htm](http://money.cnn.com/2002/06/05/news/economy/abc_money/index.htm)>.

8 Larry Burkett, *The Coming Economic Earthquake* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991), 112.

9 Denis Hayes, "Mobilizing to Combat Global Warming," *World Watch* at <<http://www.worldwatch.org/mag/earthday/hayes.html>>.

10 Hayes, 1, 2.

11 "Latest Findings on National Air Quality: 2000 Status and Trends," <<http://www.epa.gov/oar/aqtrndOO/>>.

12 As quoted at <<http://www.worldwatch.org/mag/earthday/hayes.html>>.

13 Ellen White, *Chosen Works of E.G. White on CD*, version 4.0 by MLI Software, quoting *Special Testimonies on Education* (1897), 93.

14 George Barna, "Researcher Predicts Mounting Challenges to Christian Church," 16 April 2001, at <<http://www.barna.org/cgi-bin/PagePressRelease.asp?PressReleaseID=88&Reference=E&Key=crime>>.

15 Edythe Draper, *Draper's Book of Quotations for the Christian World* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1992), as quoted in *Bible Illustrator*, Parsons Technology, entries 8909-8911.

16 Author unknown.