

On April 14, 1912, at 11.40 p.m., the Titanic struck an iceberg in the North Atlantic. Within four hours, this “practically unsinkable” ship lay on the seabed some 12,600 feet below. Of the 2,228 people on board, only 705 survived. Originally the Titanic had been designed to have 48 lifeboats on board (enough for passengers and crew if needed). However, so great was the confidence of the ship’s designers that they reduced this to just 20 lifeboats, apparently in order to prevent the decks from appearing too cluttered. This was enough for about half the people on board. The designers had got their priorities tragically wrong. They had placed appearance before safety, elegance before lives. Even as the ship began to sink, passengers were reluctant to leave the apparent security of the liner to take their chances on the open sea in small lifeboats. This meant that many of the first lifeboats were more than half empty – a further example of misplaced confidence and wrong priorities.

When the man in the crowd asks Jesus to settle a financial dispute with his brother, Jesus refuses to get involved. He knows that the man’s underlying problem isn’t this particular squabble over money, but lies in his fundamentally greedy mentality. Jesus warns of the dangers of greed, which can lead us to misplace our trust. We can look to wealth and riches for security, but Jesus warns that they will not only let us down but they will lead us to get our priorities all wrong.

In the parable of the rich farmer, Jesus depicts a man who thinks that life is all about riches. Once he has more than enough, he thinks that his life is complete, that he has nothing more to worry about. He places his trust in wealth to make him happy and fulfilled. Jesus does not accuse the man of being wicked or sinful. He is simply wrong. His wealth blinds him to what is important in life and makes him shortsighted. He thinks that his life is nothing more than eating and drinking and being comfortable. He is the ultimate materialist, and in this he sells himself short. It is as if the man is only worth the sum of his possessions. He is what he owns.

And he is also blind in thinking that this life is all there is; he cannot see beyond the horizon of his own comfort zone. His wealth has blinded him to his responsibilities to his neighbour and to God. He is totally self-centred. He talks to no-one but himself and he thinks of no-one but himself. His thoughts are all “I”, “me” and “my”. He has no-one with whom to celebrate his good fortune and no-one he wants to share it with either. His wealth has blinded and isolated him completely.

The farmer’s materialist philosophy – so prevalent today – tells us that life is all about possessions, money, and status. It makes us poor in those very areas of life which in fact should make life worth living: love, relationships, neighbourliness and hope for a future beyond death. It also robs us of our true worth as human beings. It tells us that our value is to be measured only by the size of our bank accounts. If we live like that – if our jobs, our status, our

money are more important to us than our family, our friends, our own spirit, then we have got our priorities totally wrong. We work to live, not the other way, not the other way round. We need money for the essentials – but making money is not the essence of life. Life is far richer than that. As the parable illustrates, money cannot save us. St Paul tells us that greed is in fact the same as idolatry; it is God alone, not money, who provides us with the ultimate security and purpose in life.

Like the designers of the Titanic, it is easy for us to get our priorities wrong – to think in terms of what looks good, what appears attractive on the surface. And like those passengers who were reluctant to get into the lifeboats, we can be afraid to let go of what we have been told provides security. Greed blinds us to what is essential. It blinds us to our duty to God, to the needs of others and ironically, it blinds us to our own needs too. It isolates us from our community. Security is not to be found in possessions. We are truly rich when we put on a new self – the life of Christ. He is the only security we need.