

## Chapter 5

### THE CONDUCT OF THE HEATHEN SAILORS

***Then the mariners were afraid, and every man cried out to his god, and threw the cargo that was in the ship into the sea, to lighten the load. But Jonah had gone down into the lowest parts of the ship, had lain down, and was fast asleep. So the captain came to him, and said to him, "What do you mean, sleeper? Arise, call on your God; perhaps your God will consider us, so that we may not perish." And they said to one another, "Come, let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this trouble has come upon us." So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. Then they said to him, "Please tell us! For whose cause is this trouble upon us? What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?"***

Then we are going to skip down to verse 10:

***Then the men were exceedingly afraid, and said to him, "Why have you done this?" For the men knew that he fled from the presence of the Lord, because he had told them. Then they said to him, "What shall we do to you that the sea may be calm for us?" For the sea was growing more tempestuous.***

These selected portions of chapter one describe the conduct of the heathen sailors during the storm. We will compare their conduct with the religion of the natural man who is unsaved and who has not experienced the revelation of the Spirit of God in the gospel. Let us examine some of the strengths and the weaknesses of the human religion of the heathen sailors and the natural man.

Now dropping to verse 13:

***Nevertheless the men rowed hard to return to land, but they could not; for the sea continued to grow more tempestuous against them. Therefore they cried out to the LORD, and said, "We pray, O LORD, please do not let us perish for this man's life, and do not charge us with innocent blood; for You, O Lord, have done as it pleased you." So they picked up Jonah, and threw him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice to the LORD, and took vows.***

Verse 5 says ***"the mariners were afraid; and every man cried out to his god, and threw the cargo that was in the ship into the sea, to lighten the load."*** Look first at the initial reaction of the sailors to the dangers of the storm. These men were natural men who did not have a personal knowledge of the God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land. However, they were certainly about to be introduced to Him. Before this day was over, they were going to discover who the God of heaven really was. Remember, that while the storm was brought about over God's controversy with just one

man, Jonah, let us not forget that God could have just as easily written the story about each of the people on that boat. If there were one hundred people on that boat He could have given us one hundred books describing what He was doing with each one of those people on that boat. Since the Bible affirms that "***all have sinned and come short of the glory of God,***" (Romans 3:23) it is a Biblical fact that God has an individual controversy with each person on the ship. If you are an unsaved sinner, be aware God has a controversy with you. Each human being has a relationship with the true God as his Creator, and his life up to this present time is a history of that unfolding relationship.

So when the storm arose, three things were recorded about the effects of the storm upon the sailors. First in verse 5 the text tells us they were afraid. This reveals to us that all men, even the most hardened sailors, have an instinctive fear of death when they are faced with a life-threatening situation. When I was a young boy I heard the statement that "there are no atheists in fox holes." I did not know then what that statement meant, but now I know that when you get scared enough, you will call out upon a higher power for help. That is what these sailors did. So the first thing this tremendous storm revealed was that all men have an instinctive fear of death when they are faced with a life-threatening situation.

The second thing it says in the text is "***every man cried out to his god.***" This reveals to us that in the nature of every human being there is the innate knowledge that there is a God or a Supreme Being. You may try to suppress that knowledge in your own consciousness, but your consciousness will win the battle. Every human being knows there is a God and that they are dependent creatures. When the storms of life hit, we are brought to realize that we are not our own masters or are we gods unto ourselves. Men war against this knowledge and seek to suppress it, but it can never be extinguished. It is a built-in mechanism put there by their Creator. Thus, while men may not "***like to retain God in their knowledge***" (Romans 1:28), a knowledge of God abides with them still, and they cannot blot it out. Most of the time this knowledge of God lies buried under a blanket of worldly security and sensual pleasures. This is how it is kept out of their minds. The pursuit of physical and temporal things dulls the conscience to the testimony of the fact there is a God. However, when seasons of danger and terror occur, and this innate awareness springs into view, and then prayer flowing from fear is but a reflex action and a testimony to man's basic awareness that there is a superior power over himself. An unbeliever lives day in and day out knowing there is a God, but he tries to suppress that knowledge with temporal and physical pursuits and pleasures. But when a crisis occurs, or a storm hits the side of the ship, he will see his life about to go down the tubes. That is when this instinctive, innate knowledge of God is pressed upon the consciousness and his reflex action is to cry out for help unto a Supreme Being. This is the religion of the natural man.

The third thing the text says, is they **"threw the cargo that was in the ship into the sea."** When the storm reached a crisis point and penetrated the consciousness of the sailors, reality began to set in. These sailors now realize it was better to lose their possessions than to lose their lives. In Job 4:2, Satan makes a true assessment of what he has observed about human nature. Usually we cannot trust Satan and his statements, but in this case we can. Satan observed how human beings view themselves, and his assessment was, **"Skin for skin, yes, all that a man has he will give for his life."** (Job 2:4) In other words, man wants to hold on to his life more than anything else, and when it comes down to it, he will do whatever is necessary to stay alive. In Luke 12:15 our Lord Jesus Christ made this statement, **"Take heed and beware of covetousness; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses."** The cargo on board this ship was the livelihood for these sailors. It was how they were going to make money, and they would not part with their money for anything until their life was threatened. However, when their life was threatened all else seemed insignificant. Why does it take storms and trials, some crisis in life, or even threats of death to remind reasonable beings that their souls are infinitely more precious than all the earthly things of this life? Why should not men take notice of this and act upon it without God having to confront them with a severe crisis in their lives? Many individuals that demonstrate no interest in the things of God will call for a Godly person when they are flat on their back in the hospital with a life-threatening illness. They want the preacher to come and talk to them. I once heard a story about a minister who was called to go talk to a very ill man in the hospital. The sick man wanted the preacher to come and pray for him. The minister does so and went back to visit the man three or four times. The man was very thankful. After he recovered and got well he went home, and the minister went by to call on him at his house. The man met the minister at the door but did not invite him in. The minister asked, "am I not welcome in your home?" The man answered, "No, I thank you for what you did, but we just don't need you any more." That is a very good example of the natural man's religion. He only views God as a power source to get him out of bad situations, then he forgets God and goes right back into the natural pursuits of his life. It only takes a crisis or a storm to bring out this innate awareness in fallen man's conscience that he is dependent upon his God. But after the storm goes away, the natural man regains his self-confidence and no longer needs God. Why is this the case and why does it take crisis, trials and storms to bring people to a place where they will call upon God? The answer from the Bible is that **"men will be lovers of themselves, . . . lovers of money. . . lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God"** (II Timothy 3:2-3). Men would rather be served and pampered than to serve God and others. They would rather be receivers rather than givers. You see man's love of his sin blinds him to the realities of life - - he is in love with himself. He is in love with what gives him pleasure, and it causes him to lose touch with reality in life. If you saw a person walking down the middle of an interstate highway

with a glazed look on his face, you would say that person has lost touch with reality and is likely going to be killed in just a matter of time. But likewise the person who lives his life without the love of God and the service of God is also out of touch with reality. He lives his life suppressing the knowledge of God by absorbing himself in earthly pursuits until the crisis hits, and then he becomes incurably religious. The natural man is out of touch with reality because of the darkness of his thinking, his sin and love of pleasure.

After considering the natural man's initial reaction to a crisis in his life, let us examine the natural man's religion as to how he thinks and worships. Look at verse 6. **"So the captain came to him, and said to him, 'What do you mean sleeper? (or sleepy head) Arise, call on your God; perhaps your God will consider us, so that we may not perish.'"** The sea captain assumed that Jonah had a God like all the others on the ship and asked Jonah to pray to his God so the wrath of his God might be appeased and bring about the preservation of all that was on board.

Let us now consider two facts that make a natural man who is made in the image of God, a religious being. First of all, man is a religious being from his very ability to observe the powers of the natural order around him. As man relates to the world around him, he realizes that he stands helpless before the powers and the elements of the world that are mightier than he. For example, you go out to eat and after dinner you become sick from food poisoning, a tornado can hit in the night, or a lightning bolt from a thundercloud can kill you in an instant. Other dangers are diseases that can take your life either slowly or instantly, gunshots that come from nowhere, a blown out tire on the highway or a fall from a ladder, even falling off of the first step, you fall just right and break your neck. Any one of a thousand incidents may take your life and mine from this earth on this very day. We are all at the mercy of the powers of the natural universe. Have you watched the African nature shows on television where they film the lions in the plains of the Serengeti as they stalk the antelopes and zebras in search of their next meal? Do you ever think what it would be like to be one of those zebras never knowing when you might be the dinner choice of a lion? The lions may bypass hundreds of other zebras running right by them but pick you out. What would it be like to live a life like that, facing death all the time? But the same thing is true of you and me, not because of lions, but there are hundreds and hundreds of things that can take your life and mine this very day. We know this, and this knowledge constitutes us as moral, religious beings. We know that we stand helpless before the powers and the elements that exist in the created order. How helpless we are made to feel when an unseen cancer cell can develop in our body while we sleep at night. When the powers in the natural order rise up, man knows he is at their mercy, and he senses his helplessness. Now, strange as it may seem, it is when man senses his total inability and helplessness that his greatness as a creature comes forth, because it is only then that he can realize his dependence upon God. God is the Creator and we the

creatures are dependent upon Him. It is when we are humbled and brought to feel helpless before the powers of the created order that our true greatness surfaces and then we begin to cry out to God. Instinctively, all men are religious; you do not have to instruct them. The very hour when the material elements teach man of his helplessness, he exercises the dignity of his moral being by calling out for help to his Creator. Therefore man is forced to relate to his God as Creator and to himself as a dependent creature.

On a scale of one to ten, the degree that a person or a civilization is considered heathen in their nature is the degree in which they consider themselves dependent or non-dependent upon God. If you miss that, you will miss the next statement. As a society develops its ability and technology to control the elements of the natural order, apart from the grace of God, that society will declare itself independent of God and become more darkened as technological and sociological achievements are produced. The more advanced a culture becomes and its ability to control the elements around them, the more it will become self-dependent and independent of God apart from the grace of God. If you agree with that, consider the next statement. It is time to stop comparing the poor savage in Africa who still trembles at the sound of thunder, saying, "God is angry," with our enlightened people in America today who say, "That is just a thunder clap. That is not God." It is not the poor savage in Africa who is the ultimate heathen, it is the proud American who says we can walk on the moon, so we do not even need God. Our culture is heathen, not the African culture.

We have established the fact that all men are religious by nature; first because of their ability to observe the powers of nature and secondly because of their ability to experience the workings of their own conscience. **"The heavens declare the glory of God,"** (Psalm 19:1) and men also have a conscience that tells them there is a God. Because man's natural conscience forces him to relate to the moral world around him, human beings are constantly passing judgment regarding the moral actions of others. When you get behind the wheel, it is not very long until you will start judging how everybody else is driving. If your wife is along, she will judge your driving, and if you listen to enough of it, you will start judging your own driving. Our life is continually an ongoing process of judging ourselves, judging others, and even judging the actions of God. That is why in an hour of terror our conscience tells us that God is passing judgment upon us. The sailors tell Jonah to "cry unto your God, because He is angry. Please do what is necessary to get Him off our backs." No matter how hard he tries, man cannot escape his moral consciousness, especially when God forces him to confront realities.

What a startling day of reality will be the day of final judgment when unsaved men are forced to confront every idle word they have spoken and deed which they have committed in their earthly lives before their moral Judge whose eyes shall appear as

flaming lightning-bolts of fire. On that day all of the pleasure that has kept men's minds off of having to face a moral judge will be stripped away and they will stand before a moral Creator and give an account. Reality like a storm will hit the life of the unsaved person who dies outside of Christ when he has to appear before the judgment. Men shall cry **"to the mountains and rocks to fall upon us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb."** (Revelation 6:16). However, they are not doing that today because they do not see God in that dimension, and their sin has blinded them to the realities of life.

Now let us look at the strengths and weaknesses of the natural religion. The sea captain being a natural man was unenlightened by the word of God and the spirit of God. However, there were some benefits that his natural understanding provided for him. Remember, the sea captain said, **"perhaps your God will consider us."** Natural religion, apart from special revelation, knows there is a God and that He is supreme. You do not have to have a Bible or a preacher to understand that the natural man instinctively knows this truth.

The captain's religion included many geographical gods, all assigned to different geographical regions. However, in the captain's mind, is the idea of one Supreme Being from whom all the other gods derive their powers. Remember again what he said, **"perhaps your God will consider us, so that we may not perish."** Note the words, perhaps your God -- in other words, "the one God who is the Supreme Being, perhaps you can get His attention and He will spare us." So while man is idolatrous in his fallen state, he still cannot obliterate from his mind the idea that there is one Supreme Being who is the Creator of everything. Man's connection with the natural world around him and his observation of the created order suggest to him that there is a designing mind at work, a being who possesses power, wisdom and purpose. The created order never suggests to men that there is more than one Supreme Being. **"The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night reveals knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice [of the creation] is not heard."** (Psalm 19:1-3). It is believed that only one infinite Being is necessary to account for things as they are. In fact, the idea of two or more infinite Supreme Beings possessing all knowledge and power is thought to be impossible in the thinking of the natural man. The natural man says this can only be accounted for by one infinite Being. Think what you may about cause and effect, you always must get back to the ultimate cause, and that is God. All men instinctively and intuitively know that **"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."** (Genesis 1:1). Furthermore, in addition to natural man's knowledge that there is only one Creator, man also knows by natural revelation that there is but one moral Judge of his activities. The consciences of men tell us of one Ruler and one Judge to whom we must

answer. Our consciences know nothing of two rival gods, each claiming moral allegiance. In fact the true conscience of man says with David, "**Against you and you only, have I sinned.**" (Psalm 51:4). Against one God have we sinned and it is to one moral Judge to whom we must give an account. Even the consciences of wicked men and angels confess this. "**You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even demons believe and tremble!**" (James 2:19). Even the devil and his fallen angels confess there is one moral Judge. Wicked men, wicked angels, saved people, and holy angels, all recognize they are accountable as moral beings to one Judge and not two or more infinite Judges.

Another strength of natural religion is that it knows and confesses that God is personal. One of the sailors on the ship said, "please call upon your God. He might hear us." We learn from that statement the sailor believes that God is not some impersonal power force as is portrayed in the movie, "*Star Wars*," where you did not have a personal God but a power source of evil and a power source of good (which was derived from New Age theology). But this sailor knew the help they needed was not going to come from an impersonal power source, but it would have to come from a personal being who was aware of their situation. Therefore, the natural man knows that God is personal and that His moral creature, man, can approach Him in a prayerful conversation. This fellow did not have to be taught a course on prayer. He instinctively knew that there was a Creator he could talk to. Man's natural reasoning powers allow him to know himself as an intelligent reasoning, rational creature. He can thereby conclude that his Creator must likewise possess these same abilities. He reasons, "If I have a rational mind, then surely my Creator has one. If I have intelligence, surely my Creator is intelligent. If I am responsible, surely my Creator is responsible." In fact it is stated in Psalms 94:9-10, "**He who planted the ear, shall He not hear? He who formed the eye, shall He not see? He who teaches man knowledge, does He not know?**" Therefore, the only conclusion man can reach is that the creation of an intelligent being is surely the work of a being who Himself is intelligent. If I, as a creature, can reveal my thoughts to you and you can in turn reveal your thoughts to me, then surely the God who made us both is capable of disclosing His mind to us and can hear us when we disclose our mind to Him. The natural man's religion teaches him all of this without a Bible and without a preacher.

Let us now consider the weaknesses of natural religion. Natural man's religion is sufficient to establish in the consciousness of man the existence of a personal God, but it has some weaknesses. The natural man requires a special revelation given to him in the Word and by the Spirit to overcome these weaknesses. The natural reason knows that God exists, but does not know God personally. Likewise the prayer which the natural man reasons is possible with God, the same natural reason does not know how to perform that prayer. Thus, there is a need for an additional special revelation from God on His part and faith in the revelation on our part. Otherwise, He is an unknown God like the Grecians

worshiped on Mars Hill in Acts 17. We know He is there, but we do not know what He is like. Let me illustrate. Suppose I go and walk into an art gallery. My reason concludes that a painter has been at work there. The paintings did not get there by chance, but are the work of a designing mind. As I observe the style and continuity of the art work, I can detect that the paintings are the work of a single artist and not several artists. Now I may learn many things about the artist as I study his techniques, but since I have never met him, I still do not know him in a personal way. I may know about him but do not know who he is. Then to my surprise, the artist enters the gallery and I meet him face to face. He proceeds to explain to me the purpose and design of each of his paintings. While I become impressed with his intellect and his skill, yet I still cannot say I really know who he is personally. The reason is you can never really know any person merely by discovering his intellectual or scientific abilities. You can only know a person by learning of his moral character and his heart. You must have an intimate knowledge of a person to really know him. Can you not see the error of people who think that since they know there is a God, that makes them Christians? It does not make one a Christian just because he knows there is a God, and he admires His intellect, power and His skills. You must not only know about God, you must come to know Him intimately and in a personal manner.

Nature and your conscience may tell you about God, but revelation alone discloses who He is. Suppose that I had a great need arise in my life. Could I have any confidence that the painter in the art gallery would meet that need? I have come to admire his paintings, and he has explained to me all his wisdom and his skills. However, when I have a need arise, because I do not know him personally or his character, I have no warrant that I can trust or depend upon him. Do you see why it takes a special revelation by the Word and by the Spirit to reveal Christ to you? It takes more than a preacher preaching for you to come to know God in an intimate personal way. It takes the ministry of the Holy Spirit removing the scales from your eyes so you can see, the deafness from your ears so you can hear, and giving you a believing heart so that you can trust and depend upon this God that He will do what He says He will do. This is natural religion's weakness. Natural men can know about God, but they can never know God personally.

Also, in like manner, while natural reason tells us prayer is possible, it does not possess an understanding of how God actually hears prayer. The heathen pray, but they do not have any basis for knowing whether God will hear them or not. Is that not what the sailor said? **"Call on your God; perhaps your God will consider us so that we may not perish."** The words, **"perhaps your God will consider us"** literally mean this: if the Lord will shine upon us, if the Lord will be propitious to us, or if the Lord will be favorable to us. Call upon your God Jonah to see if He will be favorable or be merciful to us. The heathen's prayer hinges on the question, "How shall God be made merciful and favorable to show favor to sinful men?" If you take away the special revelation given to us in the



Bible, we would be incapable of producing true prayer because we do not know whether God will hear us except through the Biblical revelation. We cannot learn how God can show mercy to sinners through natural revelation. The heavens may declare the glory of God; my conscience may tell me there is a God and that He can be communicated with, but these do not tell us how God can show mercy and favor towards sinners. Our prayers are strictly heathen if you take the Bible away. We may pray to God but our prayers will only be to make God favorable toward us. That is the motive of the sacrifices, the acts of penitence and all the prayers associated with the worship of the heathen and perverted Christianity. But special revelation reveals that God is propitious, and that He is enabled to show favor to guilty sinners through the sacrificial merits of Jesus Christ. I do not have to persuade God to be favorable; He is gracious and He is propitious through the merits of Jesus Christ. The heathen do not know anything about this. They have to offer sacrifices, do acts of penitence, make vows, and to say prayers, all designed to get God to be favorable toward them in an hour of crisis. It takes the special revelation for them to see that the only way a person can pray to the God of heaven and earth is through the meritorious work of Jesus Christ that has rendered God propitious.

Finally, let us examine, the natural man's view of sin. We have seen the natural man's religion and his initial response to the storm. Now let us examine the natural man's view of sin. In verse 7 we read, **"And they said to one another, 'Come, let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this trouble has come upon us.' So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah."** By casting lots, the sailors were not denying that they were sinners before a holy, moral Judge, but they were denying that each one of them was guilty of such a sin as to deserve this punishment. Most people will not deny that they do wrong. They will readily admit, "I am a sinner, you are a sinner, we are all sinners, we all do wrong." However apart from the sovereign grace of God no one will ever confess that they are great enough of a guilty sinner to be sent to hell for their sinning. None of these sailors would confess and ask, Lord, is it I? Do you remember when Jesus said at the Lord's table one of you is going to deny me and they all started asking, **"Lord, is it I?"** These sailors did not ask that. They said, "Let's cast the lots and find out who is guilty. Somebody is really a big sinner here on board or this big storm would not be upon us." This is the natural man's view of sin. Most will agree that they are sinners, but not until the Holy Spirit does His work within man's nature will anyone say, "I am a great enough sinner to be sent to hell for it."

In summary, the main lesson we learn from this chapter is that nothing short of a work of God will overcome the weaknesses of man's natural reasoning and his faulty view of his sin to cause him to turn from his idols and serve the living God of heaven and earth. As we stated in the last chapter, that is what happened eventually in the lives of these sailors. We conclude with reading these words, **"Then the men feared the LORD."** This

is the same expression that Jonah used in verse 9, "***I fear the LORD.***" This is the sailors' confession of faith, and they offered a sacrifice. Remember that God is reconciled to sinners through a sacrifice. What caused these pagan sailors to offer a sacrifice and make vows of obedience to serve Jonah's God? It was a divine work of God in their midst. Now we must turn our focus from the heathen sailors and examine our own hearts. Do you consider yourself religious? Most everyone considers themselves to have some religious beliefs, but are those beliefs based on your own imagination or have you embraced God's special revelation of Himself in the Word of God? None of us are guaranteed another day. This may be your last day on earth. My exhortation to you is do not trust your natural religion. Seek out the truth in God's Word, the Bible and seek the ministry of the Spirit to show you who God is and who you are and how you can pray and talk to Him.