

TAKE MY BONES BACK!

- A. Introduction: We want to continue our discussion of how to respond to the challenges of life rather than react. When you respond, you answer the situation with God's word. His word determines how you act.
1. James 1:2,3 says we are to respond to the hardships of life with praise to God. To praise God means to acknowledge God or to talk about who He is and what He has done. Ps 107:8,15,21,31
 - a. You cannot respond to the troubles and hardships of life without accurate knowledge from God's word about what God is like and how He works.
 1. Many people think that God is behind the trials of life either directly or indirectly. You must know that God is never behind your troubles. God is good and good means good.
 2. Many people try to figure out what God is doing by looking at their circumstances. Since bad circumstances don't come from God, you can't get any "message" from Him through them.
 - b. Hard times are made harder for us because of our confusion over "Why this is happening?" and "What is God trying to show me or teach me?", and then our resulting anger at God because we think "I've been faithful, I don't deserve to be put through this!".
 1. In the hard times we all get challenged with "Why is God letting this happen?". You have to know how to answer that question correctly in order to respond rather than react.
 2. Accusations against God based on misinformation ultimately come from Satan (Gen 3:1-6). They don't change your situation and they discourage you because they undermine your confidence in God, which makes it much easier to react rather than respond.
 2. People often say, "Everything happens for a reason". That is a meaningless cliché found nowhere in the Bible. Implicit in that statement is the idea that God is behind everything that happens.
 - a. Just because something happens doesn't mean God is behind it. People sin. Yet God is not for or behind sin in any way. People suffer and die. Yet God is not for it or behind it in any way.
 - b. Sin, suffering, and death are part of life in a fallen world. They are part of life in an earth that has been adversely affected by sin, beginning with Adam's sin in the garden. Rom 5:12
 1. In this sin cursed earth, moths and rust corrupt (Gen 3:17,18; Matt 6:19). We must interact with sinners who are influenced by Satan, as well as with carnal Christians (Eph 2:1-3; I Cor 3:3). We have an adversary, the devil, whom we must resist steadfast in the faith (I Pet 5:8).
 2. Difficult circumstances are not the work of God. They occur because of natural laws that are "out of whack" because of the curse that is in the earth due to Adam's sin. They occur because of human choice and all the ensuing consequences resulting from human choice.
 3. Because people face real problems and experience real pain, people tend to listen to sermons and Bible teachings to try to hear the solution they need to stop their immediate problem.
 - a. We are studying God's word, not just to get an answer to our immediate problem, but rather to change our picture of reality. Reality is everything as God sees it. If you can learn to see things the way God sees things it will carry you through the most difficult times in victory.
 - b. There are some basic facts you must understand about life on this earth. God's purpose right now is not to make life easy for all people. His purpose is to bring all men to salvation from their sins and make them His sons through faith in Jesus Christ.
 1. That doesn't mean there is no provision for help, happiness, and protection in this life. There is. But, life on this earth will not be pain-free or problem-free until Jesus returns.
 2. God is able to use the challenges of life in a sin-cursed earth and cause them to serve His purposes -- maximum glory to Himself and maximum good to as many people as possible -- as He gathers His family.
 4. The Bible gives us much information about how what God is like and how He works in the hard times. It doesn't necessarily give us the specifics for your situation, but it gives us general principles we can hold on to. Ps 119:92; Rom 15:4
 - a. When we examine accounts in the Bible of how God works in the hard times in people's lives, we

see that much of His work is behind the scenes. But, just because you can't see things happening doesn't mean that nothing is happening. God does things at the right time. He has perfect timing.

- b. The Lord does put off short-term blessing (like stopping your trouble now) for long term eternal results as He uses human choice and causes it to serve His purposes.
- c. God is able to bring genuine good out of genuine bad. God can cause you to thrive in extremely difficult circumstances. He will get you through until He gets you out.

B. You cannot respond to life -- you can only react -- unless you know what God is like and how He works. If you want to know what God is like and how He works, you must look at Jesus who is God Incarnate.

- 1. When Jesus was on this earth He said, "If you've seen me, you've seen the Father" (John 14:9,10).
 - a. Jesus is not the Father. Jesus showed the Father by doing the works of His Father by the power of the Father in Him. John 5:19,20; 8:28; 9:4; 10:32; etc.
 - 1. Jesus harmed no one. He did not orchestrate circumstances to see what people would do. He did not send storms or donkey cart crashes to teach people lessons.
 - 2. Jesus healed people. He set people free from bondage. He fed people. He instructed and chastened people with His words, not with afflictive circumstances.
 - b. Jesus also taught that God is a Father and that He is better than the best earthly Father. Matt 7:9-11
 - 1. How can you tell if your circumstance is from God or not? Look at Jesus. Did He do things like what you are facing. If Jesus didn't do it, God does not do it.
 - 2. Is what you are facing something a good earthly father would put his child through? If you wouldn't do it to your child, God is not doing it to you.
- 2. We also get insight into how God works in our lives by looking at how Jesus worked when He was on this earth. Consider one example. In John 6:1-14 the disciples were faced with lack. There were five thousand men, plus women and children, with only five loaves of bread and two fishes to feed them.
 - a. Why was there, why is there, lack in this world? Specifically, in that situation, because no one brought food with them. Generally, because that's life in a sin cursed earth.
 - b. Jesus did not set up the circumstance to "test" His people. Jesus' "test" was His word in the circumstance (v6). Will you believe my word despite what you see?
 - 1. By this point in His interaction with the disciples, Jesus had already told them that they have a heavenly Father who feeds and clothes those who seek Him and He will not withhold from His children when they ask Him for provision. Matt 6:25-33; Matt 7:7-11
 - 2. Even though the disciples didn't know the specifics of what God was going to do in this situation, they could have responded to the lack by resting in God's general promises.
 - c. Jesus used a circumstance that was the product of life in a sin cursed earth (people make mistakes, food is not automatically, readily available everywhere, etc.) to give His disciples an opportunity to express their faith in their unseen Father and His care of and provision for them.
- 3. But, instead, the disciples reacted and tried to "figure it out" by looking at what they could see and then drawing conclusions about it.
 - a. Philip began to think in terms of how they could meet the need if they just had enough money. Andrew reasoned away the very solution to the problem in the hands of God, a boy's lunch. v7-9
 - b. Notice that Jesus already knew exactly what He was going to do, how He was going to meet the need (v6). But, He did not tell His disciples immediately or take immediate action.
 - 1. Just because the disciples didn't know the specifics of what Jesus was going to do didn't mean they couldn't have rested on the fact that God already knows what He is going to do -- even if He hasn't given us the specifics.
 - 2. We need to learn to respond by rejoicing in the fact that God has a plan and He is at work.
 - c. Jesus wanted things done a certain way and it took time to set it up. He wanted all seated. Then, He thanked the Father, gave the food to the disciples, and they began to distribute it. v10-13
 - 1. Why all the time consuming procedure? It brought maximum glory to God. Because it was

orderly, all could see what happened. Food that should have run out immediately didn't.

2. Everyone knew it was a miracle from God. Keep in mind that even though these people had to wait, no one starved, all got enough, and there was even enough for some "to go" boxes.
- d. Even though you don't see results immediately in your situation, it doesn't mean that nothing is happening. Things are falling into place so that when results are finally seen, God gets maximum glory and as many people as possible are helped and blessed.

C. For the past three weeks we've looked at Joseph's story, a wonderful example of God who is good (and good means good) working out these principles in difficult circumstances to produce tremendous results.

1. In the last lesson we saw that Joseph grew up hearing the family stories about how El-Shaddai, the All Sufficient One, was with His people, how they lived in His presence and He answered their prayers.
 - a. Joseph heard how El-Shaddai got his forefathers to the right place at the right time, and how He provided for them and even prospered them in times of famine.
 1. Joseph heard how the Almighty God made even their enemies to be at peace with them and turned genuine evil into genuine good.
 2. He heard about how, when you serve El-Shaddai, the God of Jacob, you cannot be cheated. Nothing can be permanently against you if El Shaddai is for you.
 - b. None of this meant that Joseph's life would be easy or without problems. In fact, the opposite is true. We live in a sin cursed earth. There is no easy way to get through this life. John 16:33
2. When you encounter trouble, when you see bad things around you, and when you feel all the feelings generated by what you see, you have to know how to deal with what you see and feel.
 - a. You must know that what you see and feel does not take into account all the facts. What you see and feel gives no information about the Unseen God and His power and provision. What you see and feel is temporary and subject to change by the power of God.
 - b. Realize also that just because you "responded" to the last challenge, it doesn't mean you won't be tempted to "react" to the current challenge.
 1. Joseph and his father, Jacob, both saw the same circumstance. Jacob knew El-Shaddai.
 2. Yet, Jacob's reaction was: Everything is against me (Gen 42:36). But Joseph's response was: My brothers meant this for evil, but God meant it for good (Gen 45:5-7; 50:20).
 - c. Joseph didn't just come up with that as he talked to his brothers that day. That is how he saw his situation. That was his view of reality. It was how he looked at life.
 1. He knew he could not be permanently cheated out of years of his life, out of his family, out of his home, because he served the God of Jacob, El-Shaddai.
 2. Joseph learned from his forefathers was that there is more to life than just this life. What was not restored to him in this life would be in the life to come. Heb 11:13-16
3. God made two promises to Joseph before his trials began, greatness (Gen 37:5-9) and the promised land (Gen 28:13). Greatness was fulfilled in his lifetime but Joseph never went back to the land to live.
 - a. But, because Joseph understood there is more to life than this life, he told his family "When God takes you back to the promised land, carry my bones with you." Gen 50:22-26; Ex 13:19
 1. There was no hint in Joseph of: If I don't get it done in this life, I'll never have it. He knew that this life is not our only shot at life on this earth. Many of our talents and dreams are not even for this life. Job 19:25,26
 2. By holding on to God's promises, God's word, Joseph could look both backward and forward and, by faith (not sight) see God at work in His life, enabling him to stand and even prosper in his present difficulties.
 - b. We are not saying that you won't see God's promises fulfilled in this life. We are saying that if you have a perspective like Joseph did, it will help you respond rather than react.
4. You must know how to look at the problem in terms of what God has done, is doing, and will do. You must look past what you see. It's not what you see, it's how you see what you see.

- a. In II Cor 4:17,18 Paul called the many hardships he faced in his life momentary and light as he looked past what he could see to the unseen God at work.
 - 1. "Light" means it did not weigh him down. "Look" means to regard, to consider, implying mental consideration. To look past what you see means to mentally consider what God says about what He has done, is doing, and will do.
 - 2. Paul would have been thoroughly familiar with the Old Testament account of Joseph and how God was able to work in and through the hardships of life to produce maximum results. Paul had learned that nothing could be permanently against him. Rom 8:31
- b. Notice, both Joseph and Paul's view of reality had an eternal aspect to it. II Cor 4:17,18--For our present troubles are quite small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us an immeasurably great glory that will last forever. (New Living Translation)
 - 1. Paul knew that, in comparison to eternity, even a lifetime of suffering is nothing. No one in heaven is crying about anything they experienced in this life.
 - a. Paul was given tremendous revelation about the resurrection of the dead or the reuniting of the inward man and the outward man which were separated at death, to live an unending life on this earth after it has been fully cleanse from the curse of sin and death.
 - b. In the context of the resurrection Paul said: If in this life only, we have hope, then we are the most miserable of men. I Cor 15:19
 - 2. Paul also knew that, because of God's All Sufficiency, his life was producing eternal results.
 - c. It's easy to look at Paul's life and Joseph's life and see that the hardships they endured served a purpose and produced eternal results. Sometimes, it's harder to believe that anything of eternal value could come out of our lives.
 - 1. But, the Bible is filled with examples of people living ordinary lives, and their daily activities and the trials of life were producing eternal results -- and they didn't know it.
 - a. Jonathan's arrow carrier was part of a plan that preserved David's life. I Sam 20:18-22
 - b. Someone baked the bread brought by ravens to Elijah to keep him alive. I Kings 17:1-7
 - 2. What if those people had responded by acknowledging God instead of reacting in frustration?

- D. Conclusion: If you are going to respond rather than react to the trials of life your picture of reality (the way things really are) must come, not from what you see and feel, but from what God says.
 - 1. When you know that your problems are never from God and when you know how He works in and through the difficulties of life, you can respond with praise, with acknowledging who He is and what He has done, is doing, and will do.
 - 2. This is bad, but it did not come from my Father. He sees a way to cause this to serve His purposes and bring genuine good out of genuine bad. He will maximize this situation. God will get me through this until He gets me out. There is no permanent loss here -- no matter how it looks. Take my bones back!!
 - 3. This is not bigger than El-Shaddai! This is not bigger than my Father!!