

Scripture Reading: Proverbs 14:4

“Where no oxen are, the manger is clean; But much increase comes by the strength of an ox.”

The Value of Work

My sermon today will focus on just this one verse! There are several reasons why I choose to do this...

I wanted to follow-up a bit on the concept of doing ordinary things during ordinary time [what week are we in?] This verse has also been one of my favorite verses for many, many years [mention reading Proverbs often!]

- And finally, I trust we will get learn some of what it means to meditate on the Word of God!

Before we can properly meditate on any portion of Scripture, we must first discover it & then understand it. [discovery of a verse or chapter means reading the Word!] If while reading along in Proverbs as part of our monthly suggestions, we decided to study this verse, we would begin with what we find in the text! [The children can help us here] What is missing in the first part of the verse where we read, Where NO oxen are, the manger is clean? Oxen, very good!

Now, what two things do we have in that first statement? A manger & cleanliness.

VERY easy to keep the barn clean and orderly if there are no animals to mess it up, right?

- So, what do we have in the second half where King Solomon tells us that much increase comes by the strength of an ox?

Ah, now we have an ox! And what is the benefit of having that ox?

They are very strong and can do a lot of work that brings great increase.

After discovering those details, we are ready to begin our meditation on this verse:

First, we remember how the Proverbs often present contrasting thoughts, which is certainly the case here:

In the first part we have no oxen and a very neat and clean barn, but no increase.

In the second we have oxen who give us an increase, and they mess up the barn.

Notice that the first part does not state that there is no increase, but it is implied.

The same is true when it comes to having a mess in the barn, which is also implied in the second half of the verse.

- Each part of the verse gives us something to think about in the other part.

This is the first step in understanding what King Solomon is trying to teach us:

There are two implied priorities:

- The first is a clean manger or barn!
- The second is to have an increase.

We should note that the solution AND the problem comes with those oxen!

Without the oxen, it is easy to keep a clean barn, but very hard to go out and do all the work needed for the increase [and the increase is kind of important because you nor your family or animals cannot eat a clean barn.]

- With the oxen we can do a LOT more work on the farm and thus have the increase we need to feed ourselves and others.

So, what is more important: A clean barn or the increase?

Now if the obvious answer seems to be the increase, because we don't want to starve, then our meditation should cause us to then ask why the King presented this bit of wisdom in this way?

- Why not simply say that IF you want to survive on the farm, get some animals to do the work!
- Why postulate about clean barns if the increase is the most important?

Well any one who works a farm will tell you that clean barns are pretty important!

- Perhaps King Solomon is reminding us that BOTH are important and that a wise person gives each of them their proper priority.

A farmer who spends all of his time working the animals and neglects the barn will soon find the barn uninhabitable and unsanitary... Which in the end can cause him to lose the very animals that are important. On the other hand it is pretty obvious that a farmer who decides to sell his animals and focus on having the cleanest and most organized barn in the village will soon be begging others for food.

- In the end, the wise farmer will make sure that he has the needed animals to accomplish the work that will produce his increase.
- AND, he will make an effort to clean and care for the barn where they reside, even though they will just keep messing it up!

The next step in our study and meditation should be to ask what the Lord may want to be teaching me in this verse, which is why I mentioned that this is one of my favorite verses: One that I ponder each time I make my way through this important Book of the Bible!

- And yes, each time there seems to be more to mediate on and learn.

The first important question to ask is who the author is speaking to:

In this case King Solomon is giving direct instructions to his son, which we learned back in chapter one at verse 8: "My son, hear the instruction of your father, And do not forsake the law of your mother; 9 For they will be a graceful ornament on your head, And chains about your neck."

- Well I am not one of Solomon's children so does it apply to me?

The answer to that question is also found back in chapter one where the King began this Book by saying, "1 The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel: 2 To know wisdom and instruction, To perceive the words of understanding, 3 To receive the instruction of wisdom, Justice, judgment, and equity; 4 To give prudence to the simple, To the young man knowledge and discretion—... 6 To understand a proverb and an enigma, The words of the wise and their riddles. 7 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, But fools despise wisdom and instruction."

The Book of Proverbs is written for and to anyone who desires to be wise in the proper Biblical sense, and one who ignores this important Book is a fool.

- And yes, Proverbs has a lot to say about fools!
- But we are here this morning studying and meditating on a Proverb so we can be wise!

Continuing my meditation, I now know that Proverbs are written for me to be wise, so what am I to learn from our text?

- Well, the first thing that most of us will notice is that we have neither a barn nor any oxen!

Does this mean I should just move on and look for Proverbs that directly apply to my life? NO, it does not. Now if dad is doing a family devotion for children raised in an urban setting, he might have to first explain how an ox labors and why farms have barns.

- Now some of the kids might point out that since they have not even seen an ox or a barn, what is there for them to learn from this proverb?

Here they, and all of us, should be reminded that the Apostle Paul told young Timothy “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. [II Timothy 3:16-17]

- Ah, now thinking back to how a messy barn can be a problem, a child whose room a mess, or even Dad remembering that his desk is pretty cluttered might think it is probably a good time to move along!

But here is where the rubber meets the road for meditating on God’s Word...

- We must be open to the Spirit of God bringing such examples from our lives to our minds!

So can anyone think of an area of life where work and cleanliness are both seemingly at odds but both essential? That is certainly what we should meditate on with this verse!

- We should be led to that in our private devotions or as a family and even here this morning from a sermon!
- As I said, one of my favorites because it is so challenging when we dig deep into what the King is teaching us!

So, for this morning let us just take the average household and try to think about where this work & cleanliness might be important... And of course, these principles of balancing work with cleanliness can expanded to our work, to industry & even government in later discussions!

So, let’s start in the garage... What does a clean garage look like?

It would be all organized, with a place for each tool or object, all the garden tools are hung up and clean, the washer and dryer are empty and clean, there would be no grease spots on the floor and everything would be right where it should be.

- The perfect garage, right?

But what is the strength of the garage and what increase does it give us? Well, those garden tools cannot stay hung up and not used if we want our yard to look nice now can they?

- How long before we run out of clean clothes if mom never uses the washer & dryer?

And though it is not as bad as the old days, a car parked in the garage is going to leave some stuff on the floor, but how would the family get anywhere if we got rid of the car? And did I forget to mention bicycles?

So here we can see our lessons about both cleanliness and increase being important. We just saw how important the increase or work based in that garage is to the family, but as we saw with the barn, if we just use and use and use those tools and machines with no attention to their organization or cleanliness, the work that can be done is greatly decreased.

- How often does a ten minute repair take an hour because you spend 50 minutes looking for the tools.

Now I was able to start there in making some folks feel convicted because I just cleaned and organized my shed which has been the log in my eye for the past six months or so. I can testify first hand that now more work is able to be done in much less time.

At bottom I was wrong to let it get so cluttered that nothing could be found, and now I would be just as wrong to yell at the next person who used it for a project, or worse yet, locked it up so it stayed nice & clean. Now we can see again why this concept of ordinary time is so important in the Christian life:

Day by day I have to stay focused on getting the work done with tools and other things in my shed, while never forgetting that I must also keep it clean and organized.

Now we can move on into the kitchen! Again, what does the perfect kitchen look like?

- **Well, something right out of Victoria Magazine of course!**

Clean, organized, well decorated, fully stocked with nothing out of place, just like that clean barn.

- **Need I ask what the what increase that clean kitchen is supposed to produce with its strength?**

Well unless you are one of those rich folks who buy 5,000 square foot homes with massive kitchens and then eat out all of the time, you probably need to use the kitchen to feed your family.

- **That is going to mean dirty dishes, dirty pots and pans, dirty floors and depleted supplies.**

And since most families need three squares a day, plus snacks, when does mom have the time or opportunity to make that kitchen perfect again?

Children IF mom grew tired of doing it over and over again and finally put her foot down and said, NO more going into or using the kitchen, how long would you be able to live?

So mom has to have the same balance we learned from our text, because IF she only spent time feeding everyone and paid no attention to cleaning up or putting things back where they belong, to say nothing about buying food to replace what is eaten, the family would again be hungry & likely getting very sick.

With the principles of this proverb in mind, our dads might consider sitting down one night this week and reading through Proverbs chapter thirty one, with the children...

- **And then have a time for giving mom a big thank you and reminding everyone that while she is the 'boss' of the kitchen, there are important tasks for everyone to do.**

And of course we could extend this out to the broader house:

- **Again the perfect house is clean, all the furniture looks like new, the guest towels are hung in your clean bathroom and all the floors are spotless.**

That would certainly be clean but what is the strength of your home, what increase is needed: Your home is where you raise your children, it is where your husband finds some refuge after a hard day's work, where you might take a bath after your hard day, where the children can learn and play and yes, where you practice the hospitality we are commanded to practice. The balance of our text comes into play again:

- **When all of those activities take place they work against a clean & perfect house!**

But if the need for a clean and orderly house is overlooked then chaos insures, dad has no refuge, the kids can't find anything and you likely mom would not want to get into that bathtub.

- **And no one would come to visit even if you were not too embarrassed to invite them.**

That broader project of the home is obviously everyone's responsibility because you all live there and regular family meetings to make sure everyone is doing their part can be important.

Now the children helped us at first learn about the details of our text, so I don't want to leave them out of the applications...

- **We should ask, what does a perfect child's room look like, be they young or old?**

It would be clean, with the bed made all your clothes hung or folded in their proper place and not a single toy or book out of place!

- **Every mom's dream right?**

- **Ah, but what is the strength of that room and what is the increase it is to produce?**

That is where the children live, so like the Proverb implies, where there are no children the room is perfect!

The Lord tells us that children are a blessing so we certainly do not want to get rid of them, and so those bedrooms are where they sleep and dress, where they play and read, all things that mess up that perfect room. Again if the children do all those good things with no attention paid to the cleaning and organizing part...

- **How long before they really don't want to be in that messy room and can't find anything to wear.**

And there is a subtle lesson here for the parents when it comes to those rooms and the other areas we have considered.

Yes, kids use & mess up their rooms, the rest of the house, the kitchen and the garage as this grow older.

- **Far too often it is much easier for mom or dad to just make the bed, pick up the toys put the tools away or wash some dishes then to teach and train the children to do those important tasks.**

Beware, because not only are you doing more work then you should in the short term, but you are denying your children to opportunity to learn the lessons of our text for their future obligations.

Our text was short, but I hope you see now that it was not very simple & why I choose to focus on it this morning...

King Solomon reminded us about the importance of doing ordinary things during ordinary time, keeping that balance between a clean barn and oxen to do the work of the farm!

I hope you can now see why this proverb has been one of my favorites for many, many years and I am sure it will challenge and bless me again next January!

- **And finally, I trust we all learned a bit more of what it means to meditate on the Word of God!**

Communion Meditation: Isaiah 55

"1 "Ho! Everyone who thirsts, Come to the waters; And you who have no money, Come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk Without money and without price. 2 Why do you spend money for what is not bread, And your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, And let your soul delight itself in abundance. 3 Incline your ear, and come to Me. Hear, and your soul shall live; And I will make an everlasting covenant with you-- The sure mercies of David."