

## The Strength of the Ox

### Do you want a Tidy or a Productive Life?

Crossroad – July 11, 2010

#### Proverbs 14:4 (English Standard Version)

Where there are no oxen, the manger is clean,  
but abundant crops come by the strength of the ox.

#### 1) Original Context: The Value of the Ox

- **Form of Proverbs**
  - o 2 phrases, 2nd reinforces the 1st
  - o 2 phrases do not repeat, often not total parallel
  - o No oxen, clean ; strength oxen, crops
- **Clean and Tidy or Messy but Productive**
  - o Benefit of ox: Ethiopia study (ox versus hand cultivate)
    - 33% less labor / hectare ; +16% yield
    - plow 2-4 times as much land cultivated
  - o Issues with ox:
    - Feed and care for (also sick, die, buy new)
    - Muck out barn, deal with droppings, smells ...
  - o Cost of clean barn: significantly more work with less production

#### 2) Work Context: Attitude toward Maintenance

- **Interpretive Paradigm: I Corinthians 9:9-12**
  - o Not about the ox ... about us!
- **This week at work:**
  - o Help Tim figure out formatting in Word
  - o Cut/paste for 4 documents, change and add...
- **Perspective**
  - o Frustrated – take 15 min. fight with computer
  - o Rejoice – would take 2-4 hours with Typewriter!
- **Apply:** What is your perspective when you have to care for or clean up after the ox? Focus on the mess, or the work the ox does for you?

#### 3) Ministry Context: Tidy or Messy People

- **What kind of ministry do I want?**
  - o Clean Manger: nice and tidy and neat, run like clockwork , I do all the work so it done the “right way” (i.e. way I want)
  - o Get some Oxen: Get others involved – they may do it different, they may need to be fed, they may even leave some crap behind ... but can do far more than I can do alone!
- **Purpose of Church**
  - o Resort or Hospital? if resort, recruit people who are well, make rules so not get out of hand, and sit back and enjoy ... but if hospital, go find sick, wounded and dying and help them get better ... but the later will involve blood and vomit ...
  - o Jesus said problem with Pharisees – they were running resort .. he came for sick and dying
  - o Other problem is we are all sick and dying!
- **Apply: What do you want Crossroads to look like?** What kind of relationships do you want to have ? - neat and tidy, surface, smily face ... or real people, messy problems, but true, deep, lasting change
- For the latter we need to be willing to muck out the barn, get dirty ...

#### 4) NT Context: Christ’s Mission to a Dirty World

- **Christ came to a dirty manger**
  - o One person entitled to mansion and no dirt or work
  - o Born in manger, later said he had no bed to sleep in
- **Christ gets messy to accomplish mission**
  - o Knew mission – save lost – could not be accomplished neat and tidy – so he recruited messed up men, took abuse, even let us kill him ... to accomplish far greater redemption

#### Lesson of the Ox

I really like the clean manger ... but if there is to be abundant fruit for God’s Kingdom I need to allow the barn to get dirty, and be willing to deal with the crap that comes in this world ... all the time looking not at the dirty jobs in front of me, but at the great harvest that is promised!