

Proverbs Week #148 (14:3-4)

A fool's talk brings a rod to his back, but the lips of the wise protect them. Where there are no oxen, the manger is empty, but from the strength of an ox comes an abundant harvest. (Proverbs 14.3-4 NIV)

We have two distinct subjects in this week's lesson that have a similar theme. The first encourages us to be wise in the way we talk. The second talks about oxen, the cleanliness of a manger (a stable or possibly even a feeding trough), and the increase that can be expected by having oxen to help with farming. These two are joined together as we recognize the importance of thinking about the outcome of choices. You may have heard someone say, "You should think before you speak." As we look at each of these areas, consider how being wise will benefit you and those around you.

The book of Proverbs speaks often about speech. It contrasts the wise and foolish and cautions the naïve and simple to avoid the mistakes of the foolish. Yeshua teaches us to be careful in how we talk to one another. Do you see the connection between speaking and harvesting in these next verses?

"Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit. You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him. But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned." (Matthew 12.33-37 NIV)

Yeshua was speaking to religious people who thought they were wise and mature. He called them snakes! Yeshua is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords and He knows the hearts of men. When He walked this Earth as a man He grew in wisdom. Yeshua learned the lessons the Bible has to teach. As His disciples we are learning these lessons too. How do we "make a tree good?" Do you remember the four things we learned from 2 Timothy 3:16,17? We learned that all scripture is breathed out by God and it profits (brings increase, bears good fruit, gives a big harvest) by teaching, reproof, correcting, and training us.

...and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, "MY SON, DO NOT REGARD LIGHTLY THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD, NOR FAINT WHEN YOU ARE REPROVED BY HIM; FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES, AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES." It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness. All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness. (Hebrews 12.5-11 NAS95)

I want us to look at the second verse in the context of a family. Imagine a family, living in the time of Yeshua, that lived together on a farm. It was a large farm with grandparents who owned the farm, the extended family lived in separate houses, and children and grandchildren all helped with the work around the farm. If the grandfather decided to buy 3 or 4 oxen to help with the farm work, how would you feel if your job was keeping the stable clean? If you learned the lesson from today's proverb you might be able to endure the negative feelings (and the smell of it) that the extra work caused. You would be reminded that these strong animals would bring a greater harvest to you and your family. As the woman of valor who works with her hands in delight, you might be able to find joy in knowing that the work you are doing will bring a reward worth having. In that way the words of this proverb can keep you from being discouraged and help you to find purpose in what might seem unpleasant or difficult.