

Thought for the Day 13th August - Joan Loane

Nehemiah 4

What sort of a person are you? Are you a 'glass half-empty' person, or a 'glass half-full' person?

And are you finding this Covid period difficult? Are people interrupting whilst you are trying to work at home? Are your usual emotional outlets not there anymore...choir, music, sport, going out for meals, meeting up with friends? Do you feel powerless to keep on? What do you do when someone wants you to do something you know is not right for you at that time?

Well, Nehemiah and the people were rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, everyone working hard even though it wasn't their usual work.

Meanwhile Sanballat was becoming increasingly annoyed. These Jews had taken no notice of him when he opposed them previously. He started to taunt them with an audience to jeer at them...his 'Jeer Squad'!

'What are those feeble Jews doing?' he asked. (He was obviously concerned that they were not as feeble as he hoped!) 'Will they restore their wall?' (It was apparent that they were going that way.) 'Will they offer sacrifices?' (Now he was mocking their trust in their God.) 'Will they finish in a day?' (Now he is trying to make them lose heart because it was taking so long to do...but they were progressing too quickly for Sanballat.) 'Can they bring those stones back to life from those heaps of rubble – burnt as they are?' (Well, this was true. The stones were burnt so they cracked and crumbled.) Tobiah even suggested that a fox walking on their wall would break it down! Archaeological evidence indicates these walls were more than two and a half metres thick!

What did Nehemiah and the people do when faced with such abuse? Reciprocate with insults directed to the opposition? No, he turned to God in prayer asking Him to take action against them... 'Turn their insults back on their own heads!' Then they got on with the wall until all of it reached half its height 'for the people worked with all their hearts'.

Obviously Sanballat et al were getting very angry now so they got the neighbouring peoples on side...the Arabs, the Ammonites and the men of Ashdod...and they plotted to fight against Jerusalem and stir up trouble. What did the people do now? They prayed and posted guards round the clock. (Prayer and watchfulness with faith and action.)

But they were getting so tired. They felt their strength was giving out. There was so much rubble they felt they could not continue.

Their enemies now planned to come and kill them and put an end to the work once and for all. But there were Jews living nearby, who came and reported their plot to Nehemiah. What would they do now? Nehemiah posted armed sentries around the wall and encouraged the people... 'Don't be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes.'

When their enemies heard that they knew of their plot and that 'God had frustrated it', they did not attack. The Jews all returned to their work, under armed guard, with Nehemiah encouraging them saying "Our God will fight for us."

So what do learn from this? When things get difficult, there is no need to retaliate. Pray to our Lord and persevere. Remember our great and awesome God. We need to have God's armour on (Ephesians 6:10-18) and trust in Him for strength and deliverance.