

Thought for the Day 20th August - Joan Loane

The saga continues...

Nehemiah had been preoccupied combating the enemy forces trying to sabotage their efforts in building the walls of Jerusalem. Now he is confronted with betrayal from within by his own Jewish officials.

They were in drought and the price of grain was skyrocketing so the common people were struggling to feed their families and pay the king's tax. They and their wives raised a great outcry. (It's not often the wives get to have a say!) They had to mortgage their fields, vineyards and homes and even sell their daughters and sons into slavery. Because of this, they had no way to work their fields to get themselves out of debt. And who were organizing these deals? The Jewish nobles and officials!

Nehemiah did not confront them immediately but took some time to consider what to do. Then he accused the nobles and officials privately. They were exacting interest from their own countrymen! Jews were not permitted to charge interest from their fellow Jews, and they were certainly not allowed to sell fellow Jews into slavery.

Then Nehemiah called a large meeting and confronted them publicly. He was furious...he had been buying these slaves back who were sold to the Gentiles, and then these officials were selling them back again! They had nothing to say.

Nehemiah said, 'Shouldn't you walk in the fear of our God to avoid the reproach of our Gentile enemies?' (Not treating others with compassion was an insult to God and a blot on their testimony.)

The officials promised to give back all they had taken. (Are we willing to acknowledge our sin and do what we can to make things right with the people we have hurt?)

As governor, Nehemiah was entitled to tax the people for food and wine for himself and his men but, unlike previous governors who had also demanded silver, he hadn't asked for anything. Not only that, he fed 150 Jews and others from surrounding nations each day...it took one ox, 6 sheep plus the poultry! He was a man of diplomacy and generosity!

Paul writes in Philippians 2...'Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also the interests of others.

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death - even death on a cross.'