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Rev Robert Denham

The Lion King movie was a favourite for my children. They saw the movie, sang the songs, read the books, coloured in the pictures, drank from the cups, etc.

In some homes, it took over children's lives. Life could not go on without respect and honour to another Disney King hit.

So today, as we look at another Lion King, I thought I would be coming with the courage of a lion in a den of Daniels. Yet, part of the lesson we need to keep learning from Daniel is not to be afraid of men. We are not to baulk and quiver when we see the might and power of mankind. Rather we are to respect and trust the superlative power of the greatest King, our heavenly king.

Darius the Mede, (who we are told in the Hebrew of v28 is Cyrus the Persian) had overrun Babylon. Instead of letting anarchy take over, he kept the officials, and appointed 120 satraps to be governors. Over them, since Darius was king of the biggest kingdom ever known in the history of mankind to that time, he appointed 3 administrators, 1 of whom was Daniel. But, like Joseph in Egypt, and as he had done under Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel stood out as such a competent and trustworthy person, that Darius was ready to promote him above everyone else.

Jealousy is such an evil emotion. All kinds of plans stew in its churnings, and 2 administrators tried to catch Daniel in a game of stuck in the mud. They knew Daniel impressed Darius, so to prevent him crawling through Daniel's legs to release him; the king had to be caught first.

They kept surveillance on Daniel and they combed the law to find some mud strong enough to stick. No charge could stick, unless it had to do with Daniel's God and his law. But not only did they have to know Daniel well, and know the law well, they also had to know Darius. They then found the water to create the mud.

Daniel was faithful to God, and was in the habit of praying 3 times a day. He would go home and through a small high window he would look towards Jerusalem to pray.

The Law of the Medes and Persians had a unique clause. Once a law was written down, it could never be rescinded, never be taken away. That meant great care in making laws, because there was no legal whiteout.

Darius was the king of the largest nation on earth. Most of the world hung on his command. And his crown perched on his swelling head. He enjoyed

flattery, and what challenge had he never succeeded in? He had achieved more than anyone ever had done before! Surely there were no limits for him! With that ground for their watering, mud soon glugged.

1st they tricked the king into making a blasphemous law. *Anyone who prays to any god or man during the next 30 days, except to the king, shall be thrown into the lions' den.* He agreed because they said all the administrators and satraps had agreed to it. His swollen head was enormous. He had power over lives, and now he yearned for control of hearts. No prayers to anyone for help or advice for 30 days, except to the king. He was the greatest. All hail the king! For the king was now not just a god, but the god above all gods.

Next they enshrined it in written law. *Now, O king, issue the decree and put it in writing so that it cannot be altered -- in accordance with the laws of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed.*

What should you do if the law requires you to go absolutely against what you know God wants you to do?

Some nations in the Middle Ages and times flowing from it, said that God placed the king in place, so you must obey. Others said that God had placed the church as the conscience for the king, so if the Bishop, pope or whoever said do not, you did not. Kings did not like being overthrown by clergymen, and that is one reason Henry VIII began the Church of England.

But what if the law went right against what God wanted? What should you do? Romans 13 says obey the law. But Revelation 13 says that if the law is evil, do what God says is right. However, if you do what is right, you will have to suffer the punishment.

Darius realised his mistake when Daniel was bogged in the mud. But try as he might to crawl between his legs to free him, the king was stuck too. For the law was L-A-W and he had no power to change or contradict it. Daniel had to go into the lion's den.

He could not even go into an empty one. Legal loopholes were firmly sealed. His life was gone. -- no earthly hope left.

How would Daniel respond? Unlike God's faithless leaders he refused to look for compromise deals with the king, or with other nations, pinning his hopes on them. Daniel was God's faithful servant.

He would be faithful to the end. And because he was, the king was more impressed. *'May your God,*

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*whom you serve continually, rescue you!*' A stone was brought and placed over the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the rings of his nobles, so that Daniel's situation might not be changed. Then the king returned to his palace and spent the night without eating and without any entertainment being brought to him. And he could not sleep.

Another stone covered a place of no hope. It too had the royal seal. Concerned people could not sleep. All hope was lost. Is God that powerful? Or is God just the wishful thinking of deluded people who cannot face the stark realities of life? Far better to be a shrewd politician, who can give their enemies the kiss of death, the lion's share of dinner.

Go home! See you later! Nothing more! The credits are rolling!

Then Tim Shaw's "But wait" pops up: *Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to rescue you from the lions?*

What! There's more?? In dawn's light he had rushed to the den to hope against knowledge that Daniel might still be alive. God did not disappoint. In joy Darius wrote to all people *I issue a decree that in every part of my kingdom people must fear and reverence the God of Daniel. For he is the living God and he endures forever; his kingdom will not be destroyed, his dominion will never end. He rescues and saves; he performs signs and wonders in the heavens and on earth. He has rescued Daniel from the power of the lions.*

But when Jesus was sealed in, everyone knew he had not been rescued. Daniel went in alive, Jesus went in dead. Daniel had a lion's whisker of hope. Jesus had none. Yet God saves! God rescues! And the surprise of the empty tomb was not just that Jesus had come back, but the surprise was that our tombs will be emptied too.

We who are weak, who are rarely as faithful as Daniel, who find persecution horrendous and can hardly stand a sideways glance from a hostile Christian let alone a Darius or Caiaphas... we will be raised because of His empty tomb.

If you had to write a letter of joy, what would you write?

Peter wrote one. He said *Praise be to the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade - kept in heaven for you, who through faith are*

*shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.*

How strong is your hope? Or rather, how strong is the God you hope in? He is almighty! Live for him!