

## **Introduction**

One of the things I find amusement from is browsing the internet and finding ridiculous things. When doing that today I found some bizarre rules that apply in some of the States of America

*It is illegal to wear a fake moustache that causes laughter in church.*

*It is legal to drive the wrong way down a one-way street if you have a lantern attached to the front of your automobile.*

*While it is legal to shoot bears, waking a sleeping bear for the purpose of taking a photograph is prohibited.*

*Owners of flamingos may not let their pet into barber shops.*

*It is illegal for a car without a driver to exceed 60 miles an hour*

Sometimes there are rules and restrictions put on us that are silly and we need to stand up against them and not obey. But that can take courage. We can learn more about this in tonight's Old Testament reading.

It is taken from one of my favourite Old Testament Books. It is a mixture of story – the story of the people of Israel during their captivity in Babylon and of visions and prophecy which predict judgement on the Kingdom of Babylon but also, as many prophecies do can be applied to the end times

It is written about and includes the visions and prophecies of a young man called Daniel who was taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar's armies while besieging Jerusalem. The captives were deported to Babylon. Many of them sadly, became integrated into the Babylonian way of life and absorbed its practices and religion. However, Daniel managed to stay committed to serving his God despite the temptations and pressures around him. He refused the rich food and drink consumed in the Royal Household preferring to stay pure, He refused to worship an enormous statue of Gold made in honour of King Nebuchadnezzar and in punishment was thrown into a fiery furnace with three of his companions – which they survived through God's miraculous protection.

Daniel had prospered in his new life. He followed God faithfully and because he was honest and upright he did his job well and the rulers of the country came to trust him and give him more and more responsibility.

At the beginning of chapter 6 we are told that Darius, the Mede, who was now in power appointed him and two other men to supervise the governors and look after the king's interests

Daniel soon showed that he could do better work than the other supervisors or the governors and because he was so outstanding the King considered putting him in charge of the whole empire.

Not surprisingly this caused the other supervisors and governors to become jealous of him. They tried to find something wrong with the way Daniel administered the empire.

They couldn't because he was reliable and didn't do anything wrong or dishonest. How marvellous to be in a position where no one can find anything against you. This was a truly honourable and Godly man. – So his opponents decided the only way to attack him was through his faith.

They went to the King and suggested to him that he issued an order that everyone in the empire should worship him Darius, and not be allowed to worship any other god. The punishment would be to be thrown to the

lions. This was quite clever because they were flattering the king. It was quite an unusual suggestion because it wasn't common in the Persian Empire like it was in the Roman and Egyptian empires for people to worship the emperor or king. But they pandered to his vanity and persuaded him to invoke the law of the Medes and the Persians which was an unbreakable edict. Once a law had been passed by the King it could not be revoked.

Daniel's response to this new law was to continue to do as he had always done, which was to pray three times a day – and more than that to pray at his window which pointed in the direction of Jerusalem. You may have thought that it would be reasonable for him, under the circumstances, to pray more privately, shut away from sight. But, no, he continued the habit of his lifetime. For the past 60 odd years he had prayed at his window facing Jerusalem and he continued to do so.

His enemies couldn't wait to rush and tell the king that Daniel had broken the law and must be punished. Can you imagine their glee? They had finally caught Daniel out.

The king was distraught. He liked and trusted Daniel and knew that he didn't deserve to be treated this way and he did his best to find

**Readings**                      **In the den –can you stand firm? Evensong Thriplow**  
**Daniel 6: 11-18**  
**Mark 15:46- 16:8**

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some way to rescue Daniel. He kept trying until the evening when the enemies returned and demanded that Daniel be punished for praying to his God. So the king gave orders for Daniel to be arrested and thrown into the pit with the lions.

The king at this point displayed hope that God could rescue Daniel – it could almost be called faith. He said, “May your God, whom you serve so loyally, rescue you!” and returning to his palace he spent an anxious sleepless night, taking no interest in food or any other sort of entertainment.

In the morning the king returned to the pit and you can imagine his mixed feelings, anticipation, fear, that sort of washing machine feeling in the stomach.

He called out, “Daniel, servant of the living God, was the God you serve so loyally able to rescue you from the lions?” .... Note Daniel’s witness had left the king in no doubt that the God he served was the **living God** and he was expectant that God would have protected his faithful servant.

Sure enough Daniel’s voice came back, “May your majesty live for ever! God sent his angel to shut the mouths of the lions so that they would not hurt me. He did this because he knew that I was innocent and because I have not wronged you, You Majesty!”

The king was overjoyed and gave order for Daniel to be pulled up out of the pit. Then he gave orders that the men who had plotted against Daniel be arrested and themselves thrown into the pit. He then wrote to all of his subjects commanding them to fear and respect Daniel’s God, saying this: “He is a living God and will rule for ever. His kingdom will never be destroyed, and his powers will never come to an end. He saves and rescues; he performs wonders and miracles in heaven and on earth. He saved Daniel from being killed by the lions.

So what can we learn from this story?

Well firstly we see that there is nothing vague about Daniel’s witness. He is prepared to serve his God and give thanks to him in the midst of possible danger and persecution. He does not water down his worship of God when it becomes dangerous to show his faith. He is not put off by fear of the consequences. This story shows us that a person of faith must be prepared to live

dangerously.

And we also see that God did not rescue Daniel **from** the lion's den. He did not stop bad things happening to his follower. He rescued him **in** the lion's den. When Daniel stood firm and took the consequences of his faith God showed that he had the power and the willingness to rescue him. He will not necessarily save us from difficult situations but he will support and sustain us in them.

Sometimes people can use fear to make us do things. We can be pressurised to conform to the standards of the people and the world around us by fear that they will reject us or ridicule us. If we are afraid of the consequences we can find it hard to stick to what we know is right so we need help to stand firm.

Daniel found help from a lifetime's habit. He had committed himself to God as a young man and when he first arrived in Babylon had made the decision to put his loyalty to God before his loyalty to the king. This was his first step in a life-time of refusing to compromise whilst living in pagan Babylon.

He established a pattern of personal prayer in order to develop and safeguard his relationship with God. So when that habit was challenged it was unthinkable for him to change it. It was because he habitually prayed that he was able to continue to pray faithfully despite opposition. If it had not been a regular habit it would have been easier to stop.

If we develop good habits for ourselves in prayer and worship and consistently refuse to give in to temptation in small matters it will help us, like Daniel, not to waver when it comes to hard decisions.