

The Slave and the Lion

(Time – 3.18)

Once upon a time a poor slave was very badly treated by his master. He was beaten and starved - and so he ran away. He knew that if his master caught him he would be killed, so he decided the safest place to hide would be somewhere in the middle of a great hot sandy desert. As he wandered about the desert in search of food and shelter, he came to a cave. It seemed to be empty and he entered it. He sat down on a rock. And then suddenly from behind him there was a roar! He looked over his shoulder and saw an enormous lion. He closed his eyes and made ready to die.

But the lion didn't spring on him. It came forwards whining and fawning. The slave saw it was lifting one of its paws. The lion put its foot onto the slave's knee; it was swollen and sore. The slave lifted it gently and examined it; there was a large thorn embedded in the ball of the foot. Carefully, the slave pulled out the thorn. He cleaned the wound and bound it with a piece of cloth torn from his own tunic and soon the wound healed. From that day onwards the lion treated the slave as a friend. Every day he would go out hunting and bring back food; the slave would make a fire and cook the meat. They would sleep side by side in the firelight.

After several months though, the slave began to long for human company. He said goodbye to the lion and made his way across the desert to a city. As he approached the city it so happened that his old master was riding along the same road. When he saw his lost slave he shouted: 'Seize him! Seize him!' The slave was captured and condemned to death. 'And it won't be a pretty death,' said his master, 'You'll be thrown to a wild beast. You'll be eaten alive.'

At the end of the week he was brought to the arena. A great crowd had gathered to watch. In a cage there was an enormous lion, pacing to and fro, roaring and growling. The slave was thrown into the arena. The door of the cage was opened. But to the people's amazement the lion, as soon as he saw the slave, bounded across to him like a huge tame cat, rubbing himself against him and purring. The slave stroked the lion's head and back, the lion licked the slave's cheek, as though he was a kitten. The lion had recognised his old friend. The spectators were amazed. They started shouting: 'Spare his life! Spare his life!' And the governor of the city, when he heard the story, marvelled at such gratitude in a wild beast and ordered that both slave and lion should be set free.