

✠ Deuteronomy 17:1-7 ✠

IN NOMINE IESU

“On the evidence of two or three witnesses the one who is to die shall be put to death.” Why was this person to be put to death? Because he had bowed down to idols, forsaking the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and following after false gods.

He walked in the way of the wicked, stood in the way of sinners, and sat in the seat of mockers. His delight was not in the law of the Lord, and on His law, he did not meditate day and night. If he had, then he would not have followed the false gods. His life would have been saved.

Yet, if any were found who transgressed the covenant and were found serving other gods and worshiping them, they were to be taken outside the camp and stoned to death. God is a jealous God. He is not willing to share His glory with another. He is not willing that His children, His chosen ones, should bow bended knee to any by Him alone.

This is the first commandment: you shall have no other gods.

We see this law in effect in the Garden when God cast the man and woman out of the garden, and into the wilderness. He had, in effect, taken them outside the city gates where they would die. As He said, “From dust you are and to dust you shall return” (Genesis 3:19).

So also, the Flood fulfilled this law when God destroyed every living thing except Noah and his family. God took humanity, who had turned its back on God and worshiped false gods, and wiped it out. He stoned it with water.

We see this law at work with the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. God stoned these cities to death with fire from heaven because they were an abomination to Him. They had prostituted themselves out to other gods. The result was their annihilation.

But God told the Israelites that no such stoning would take place without the witness of two or three against the idolater. In the case of the Garden, the Flood, and Sodom and Gomorrah, God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit bore witness against them. Three witnesses condemned the ungodly.

Yet there is room for mercy in this law. For without the witnesses, the guilty is not punished. Or at least, he is not stoned. (God will not be mocked; idolatry will not go unpunished.) So also, according to the law, between the time the guilty is accused, the witnesses gathered and testify, and the carrying out of the sentence, the accused has ample opportunity to repent and seek mercy from the judge. Mercy that God said must be shown. Love your neighbor as yourself; in this the Law of Moses is summed up.

So even in the Law there is room for mercy. In fact, the Law was given to in order that mercy would be demonstrated and sought after. The Law demands retribution and justice, but mercy is greater than the Law and offers forgiveness and reconciliation.

But still, the Law must be satisfied. Justice must prevail. The condemned must die. The

evil must be purged. And so it was that this law that was meant to drive men to repentance and faith, became the source of our Lord's crucifixion. Jesus was accused of blaspheme. He was accused of following a false god, some god He called Father. He was accused of profaning the temple. But the religious leaders knew that God would sire no human, that Israel was God's only son, and the temple was God's house.

But they did not see that God's sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law. They did not see that God's Son was the true Israel. They did not understand that He is the true Temple; a Temple not made with hands.

Neither did they see that God's Son bore their idolatry of worshiping the Law rather than worshiping God, their idolatry of worshiping their own religiosity and piety rather than confessing their sins and seeking mercy. And so, accused and condemned on the witness of two or three, though the witnesses could not agree, Jesus was taken outside the city gates and stoned with a crown of thorns and metal spikes.

The evil was purged. Death died. Sin died. The Law was satisfied. God was merciful to you and to me. He sent Jesus to die in our stead. He turned His back on His only-begotten, bearing witness against Him, and stoned Him to death with our sins.

But death could not hold the Son of God for in Him there is no lawlessness. On the third day He rose again from the dead. Once the evil is purged, life abounds. He has eternal life. He has been given dominion of heaven and earth. He holds the keys to life and death.

And with His keys He kills you and makes you alive. He stones you with the floodwaters of Baptism. He drowns your sinful nature, stoning it with His Word until the evil is purged. Then He breathes His Spirit into you, where He makes His home, abiding with you. He unlocks heaven's gates and ushers you in where you feast on His body and blood, restoring you to life.

For there are three that bear witness: the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree (1 John 5:7-8). Three witnesses bear witness to the forgiveness found in Christ. These three bear witness to the life given in Jesus' name. These three witnesses bear witness to your life in Christ.

Now there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. There is no law to accuse, for the Accused has satisfied the demands of the Law. Now there is only peace. The peace of God in Christ Jesus. Let this peace rule in your hearts and minds until the Day of our Lord Jesus.

In the name of the FATHER and of the ✠ SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT.

✠ AMEN ✠