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The poisoning of two Russians by a military-grade nerve agent in Salisbury on 4th March continues to dominate the news in the United Kingdom. The international condemnation of the Russian state for this extraordinary crime, on the basis of confident statements from the British government as to who is to blame, has been rapid and widespread, while the Russian leadership continues to deny any involvement, seeing the whole thing as a crafty western ploy to discredit Russia.

What IS “the truth” in such a case? – for it involves such a tangle of truth and falsehood and requires such careful interpretation of evidence, all set within both the shadows of espionage and the fierce glare of publicity. Let us sincerely hope that the British Government does know the actual truth here, and is truthfully telling us that truth! – or at least as much of it as it cares to tell.

So we have before us here just the latest example of the old questions about Truth which sometimes can be genuinely hard to answer. Pontius Pilate faced this in his confrontation with the Lord Jesus that morning (John 18.38). It did not take him long to know the answer to his question, as well as what he should do about it (vv 18.38b / 19.6 & 12a), but he finally went for the easy option (19.16a).

Earlier in the Gospel of John, in Chapter 8, we have the record of lengthy exchanges between Jesus and the Jews, which again come down to matters of truth – is Jesus telling the truth as to who He really is? He claims, “I am the light of the world. The one following me will in no way walk in the darkness, but will have the light of life” (8.12, Literal), followed by further claims of His Messiahship in the subsequent verses, making His questioners first puzzled and then increasingly irate (vv 13, 19a, 20b, 22, 25, 27, 33, 39, 41b, 48, 52-53, 57).

Some of Jesus’ answers must have particularly riled them, such as: “For if you do not believe that I AM, you will die in your sins” – here was that “narrow way” of salvation by faith in Christ alone, set quite apart from the keeping of the law (Matthew 7.13-14 / John 8.24), a wholly new concept for His Jewish listeners and far from welcome; and, “You are from your father the devil (8.44a, Lit), hardly calculated to make Him popular; and supremely, “Truly, truly I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM” (8.58, Lit). Nobody spoke to Jews as Jesus was speaking to them! Finally, “they took up stones” against this Man because of His calm claims of divinity (v 59) – they had had enough, and, like Pilate later on, it became a matter of, “Never mind the truth, let’s get rid of Him”.

Jesus remains as awkward a Figure today as He has ever been, in the eyes of both Jew and Gentile. He won’t go away, and by His very presence He compels reaction, a reaction either of acceptance and worship, or of rejection and a reaching for those metaphorical stones in that old spirit of “We will not have this man to reign over us” (Luke 19.14b, KJV). As those Jews learned in the exchanges recorded for us by the Holy Spirit in John Chapter 8, Jesus’ words were and still are unanswerable, and His claims to the divine Messiahship were and still are irrefutable.

The search goes on to find the truth behind that dreadful nerve-agent attack in Salisbury. Yet whatever may be the other consequences of such a sin and crime, it

certainly demonstrates to all of us in this fallen world our need of “the one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus”, who is “the way, the truth and the life”, (I Timothy 2.5 / John 14.6, KJV).

God gives us “grace and truth” in and through the Lord Jesus (John 1.14b and 17b). Jesus told those “Jews who believed on Him” in John 8.31-32, “If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free”.

These words were true then and are true now, for the Lord remains “the same, yesterday, today and forever” (Hebrews 13.8). The deep blessings these words convey apply to all who accept Him as Lord and Saviour, and our simple task is to live them, proclaim them and share them.

So the truth we can close with this time is just this: because of Christ who takes away the sin of the world (John 1.29), the time is coming when nerve-agent attacks, along with all other sinfulness, will finally be gone.

Alleluia – let us praise the Lord!

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