



"Grief should be the instructor of the wise.  
Sorrow is knowledge: they who know the most  
Must mourn the deepest."  
—Lord Byron

**20-Mar-09**

## *A Man of Sorrows*

The radio and television news broadcasts over the past six months have been so depressing that listeners and viewers have complained to the stations to look for something good and encouraging to report. These requests have been so frequent that Brian Williams, anchor of NBC's Nightly News, requested viewers to send in news items of an upbeat, encouraging, and cheerful nature. In like manner, Charlotte's only 50,000-watt, clear-channel radio station, WBT, began broadcasting a small segment of each morning's program devoted to good news from around the Charlotte area.

If an individual is of this world, he has much to be depressed about. National economies worldwide are in a shambles largely as a result of individual, corporate, and national greed. It seems as though the entire world has been on a decades-long spending binge, living almost as if there is no tomorrow, so we had better get it now or life will pass us by. Entire nations, let alone individual families, are living on the edge of financial oblivion. It is virtually certain that a revamped economic system will arise, as we seem close to a much different international order of conducting business. It leaves even a fairly knowledgeable viewer of this present chaos in a stressful state of uncertainty and apprehension. It is certainly not a happy time in which to anticipate the future.

What about the Christian? Is he to laugh blithely through these times, as though nothing negative will touch him since [God](#) promises that He will always be with him and provide

for him? Does the Christian get a "free pass" that excludes him whenever [the world](#) around him is experiencing a disaster? Do tornadoes curve around his home, or do hurricanes blow only gentle winds over his property? Do wars and national financial disasters simply pass by without giving him so much as a scratch on his person or a mark on his property?

These questions are pertinent because [Isaiah 53:3](#) says of [Jesus](#), "He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." Jesus shared life with those of His neighbors. Untold numbers of circumstances were capable of causing Him to feel rejection, sorrow, and grief. He endured Judea's subjection to Rome and shared with its citizenry the stresses and strains of the occupation of their homeland. [Hebrews 2:17](#) adds, "Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a [merciful](#) and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people." Jesus anticipated what was coming on the nation, prepared for it as well as He could, and persevered through it along with the rest of His fellow citizens.

These days, one of the main objects of life for most people seems to be seeking out someone or something to make them laugh. It is not wrong to laugh; God certainly built that capability within us. Indeed, some of His creations are quite humorous to observe. It is interesting to note that the New Testament contains not one instance of Jesus laughing, smiling, or grinning. There are a few references to His being glad, so perhaps His gladness caused Him to smile. He speaks frequently of His [joy](#), but mere laughter is not joy. Joy is a fruit of God's Spirit, and it is therefore a spiritual quality. Anybody, whether or not he has God's Spirit, can merely laugh. Laughter, which can also be cruel and sarcastic, appears to be on a lower level of importance to life than joy.

The overall impression from God's Word is that life is serious business that requires full-time attention. Jesus instructs us in [Matthew 7:14](#), "Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it." Our Lord had only one opportunity to live life for the purpose of providing the Sacrifice sufficient to justify those of [faith](#) before God. His purpose was so serious that it gave Him no latitude for even one [sin](#). His offering had to be perfect. He could not depend upon God's mercy that it was "just a little sin," or that the conduct of the Romans forced Him to sin, or that [Satan](#) tricked Him. We are to follow Christ, and obviously, He took His calling to be our Savior seriously.

In the [Sermon on the Mount](#), Jesus lays out before us the foundational attitudes and conduct He commands and looks for in His disciples. He says in [Matthew 5:4](#), "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." Human nature hates [mourning](#). If given any choice at all, we shrink from mourning as rapidly as we can. Yet, Jesus says

that those of His disciples who mourn are blessed! This begs the question, "If they are blessed, why do they mourn?" Surely, this is an anomaly that the unconverted find hard to believe.

One thing is certain: Jesus does not speak here of every kind of mourning. Scripture shows us three kinds of mourning. Millions, indeed billions, mourn over dashed hopes like financial reverses, failure to land a job, rejection by a highly respected person, or the loss of a loved one. Many of these people may actually be under God's condemnation without any promise that they will be comforted. In addition, there is a sinful mourning—like the hopeless sorrow of Judas Iscariot—that is disconsolate and inordinate, that refuses to be comforted.

Finally, there is godly sorrow, a spiritual mourning authored by God, which is the subject of [Matthew 5:4](#). This mourning begins and then proceeds from a genuine conversion upon [repentance](#) after God calls us. It is the beginning of a real sense of sin and its disastrously evil effects. Many thousands confess that they are sinners, but how many have never mourned over this fact? How many of us have mourned like the woman of [Luke 7:37-38](#), who washed Jesus' feet with her tears? The publican in [Luke 18:13](#) smote upon his breast, crying out, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" He did this because he felt the plague of his own evil heart.

On that great day of Pentecost when the [Holy Spirit](#) was given and Peter preached a truly inspiring sermon, [Acts 2:37](#) tells us that the people were "cut to the heart" and said, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" This mourning springs from a sense of sin combined with a tender conscience and a heart broken over the cost to receive forgiveness. This mourning springs from the agonizing realization that *my sins* nailed Jesus to the stake. [Zechariah 12:10](#) prophesies, "Then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn."

By no means is this mourning confined to our initial contrition. It should be a present and continuous experience as we grow in understanding that we can say with Paul, "Oh wretched man that I am!" ([Romans 7:24](#)). He was undoubtedly at times acutely aware of the swellings of his pride, the coldness of his love, or the lack of fruit. In the same way, we, too, groan at times within ourselves as the sharpness of our memories chasten us as we meditate on the course of our lives.

As we approach [Passover](#), now is a time for deep introspection. We must do this, beginning with a profound appreciation for the sacrifice of our Savior, so that we may receive God's gracious promise to be comforted.

## *From the Archives: Featured Sermon*

### [Narrow Is the Way](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

John Ritenbaugh teaches that biblical liberty consists of choosing to whom we will submit and by whom we will be constrained. Making wrong choices, largely in ignorance, has placed us in bondage to sin and destruction. God's truth indeed limits our choices'largely in matters of right and wrong. A mind focused on too many choices becomes confused, so when God gives us liberty, He for our good takes away most of the choices we would have if we continued in our carnal pursuits. Paradoxically, then, becoming a slave of righteousness'maintaining the narrow way'actually leads to freedom, peace of mind, and ultimately, God's Kingdom.

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## *From the Archives: Featured Article*

### [The Beatitudes, Part Three: Mourning](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

Blessedness and mourning seem contradictory to our way of thinking, but obviously Jesus saw spiritual benefits to sorrow. John Ritenbaugh shows why true, godly mourning gets such high marks from God.

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