

A young man visited his grandfather who was dying. The grandfather had lived a full and productive life and garnered much wisdom along the way. The grandson was looking for guidance, struggling with doubts about faith and about how to live his life.

The grandfather listened patiently, attentively. He had lived by the guidance found in Micah 6:8 and it had served him well. He assured his grandson that if he acted justly, loved goodness, and walked humbly with God, life would not necessarily be easy, but he would know fulfillment.

What Micah succinctly and beautifully describes is a view he shares with Isaiah: ethical behavior is of the first importance, more important than ritual rightly observed, more important than piety rightly practiced.

What Micah knew is that acting morally—doing what is just and good—clarifies our vision of life and the world. Our capacity to perceive reality, to see the true nature of things, corresponds to the condition of our souls. *How blissful the pure in heart, for they shall see God.*

Abraham Maslow believed the world can communicate to a person only that of which he is worthy, that which she deserves or is “up to.” A society in moral decay is blind to the realities perceived by saints. The old adage applies: we see the world not as it is, but as we are.

If morality is utilitarian, a matter of enhancing our position and prestige in the eyes of others, rather than a matter of spiritual obligations transcending personal concerns, then we have no sound motive to act in accord with anything other than self-interest.

If, however, moral truth, has the power to command the will to act regardless of the consequence for the actor’s personal welfare, if morality is binding upon the conscience of any rational man or woman, then every deed performed for the sake of its moral goodness is an act of faith. (David Bentley Hart)

In the Beatitudes Jesus describes what is just, what is good, what it looks like to walk humbly with God. We, however, have a hard time seeing such a life as blessed let alone blissful.

The meek are available for all manner of insult, the poor have no effective recourse against the blithe designs of the rich, the merciful are prime objects for whatever device the brutes ordain.

In time, the meek, the poor, the merciful become mute relics for those who mourn. If any still crave righteousness, they are maligned, then shot or burned. If the pure are anywhere present, we wouldn’t know them, which is to their advantage. And those who

make peace are jailed in adjoining cells, simply dismissed from any arena that matters.  
(Scott Cairns)

Was Jesus delusional? Was he articulating an ideal impossible to achieve to reveal how flawed we are and how much in need of grace, as Martin Luther believed? Or, was he describing a way of life that corresponds to the nature of God, that if lived enables one to know God?

If God is not simply someone who is good, but goodness itself, if what we call goodness is, in its essence, God as the original source and ultimate fulfillment of love, the transcendent reality in which all things exist, then we condition our souls for knowing the true nature of things, for knowing God, by humbly doing what is just and good.

In the absence of belief in a transcendent purpose in life or in an eternal standard of moral truth, in the absence of a capacity for astonishment before the mystery of being, the great task is that of creating some ultimate meaning out of the imperfect materials of human nature. This is what we have done.

We are principally concerned with purchasing things, in ever greater abundance and variety, and so have to fabricate an ever greater number of desires to gratify, and to abolish as many limits and prohibitions upon desire as we can. We don't educate our desires; we give them license and call it freedom.

Our sacred writ is advertising, our piety is shopping, our highest devotion is private choice. The one truly substantial value at the center of our social universe is the price tag. There are no ultimate values, only final prices.

This vision of life is a diverting alternative to thinking deeply. It is a narcotic. This irreligion is the opiate of a materialist culture, the sigh of the oppressed ego, the heart of a world filled with tantalizing toys.

We are created in the image of God and called to grow into the likeness of God. If moral truth corresponds to the nature of God, then living morally clarifies our vision of life, the world, and God, and reveals the way of life that leads to fulfillment, the path to blissful union with God.

(This sermon is informed by the work of David Bentley Hart.)