

Today I want to compare your faith in Jesus to being a Packer fan.

How's that for an attention-grabbing opening sentence? I imagine about 80% of you are completely keyed in right now, hanging on my every word, "Finally, a sermon about the Packers – and from a Lions fan!"

You other 20% (maybe less than 20%), who may not be Packer fans, or at least not rabid Packer fans, don't worry, this sermon is for you too.

There are few fan bases in our country that come even close to the passion of Packer fans – I can freely admit that, as a Lions fan. I've heard it said that the Packer fan base is so passionate that there is not even really a comparison in American sports. The closest comparison is how Europeans feel about their soccer teams.

So, go ahead and pat yourselves on the back for being a passionate fan base.

It's that passion that you Packer fans have for your team that I want to focus in on today. I want to talk about how you got your passion, how you display your passion, and how you share your passion for the Green Bay Packers.

And for those of you (like me) who are not passionate Packer fans, you can take any passion of this world, any passion you have and replace "Packer fan" with that, and what I'm about to say applies to you too.

Most of you have been Packer fans for your entire lives. Most of you were born in Wisconsin, into Packer loving families, so this is just who you are, this is just what you do – you cheer for the Green Bay Packers. Most of you grew up with Packer loving moms and dads and you learned from them what it means to be a passionate Packer fan. Without them ever having to sit you down and give you a formal education on how to be a Packer fan, you watched and you learned how to be passionate about the Packers.

You learned what an exciting thing it is to be a Packer fan when you saw your dad jump off the couch, throw his hands up in the air, and scream at the TV for a big play.

You learned what hope looked like as a Packer fan when at the beginning of every season your parents would fill their conversations at home, at church, at school, at work with talk about this year being "the year".

You learned what perseverance and faithfulness was like as a Packer fan during some of the dry spells in Packer history, when winning the Super Bowl wasn't even on your mind, let alone the sole measure of a successful season like today's Packers.

Without having to sit down and memorize them, by sheer exposure you learned by heart the game of football, the rules, the strategy, the stats, the names. It wasn't homework to memorize all those facts and numbers because it was your passion.

You saw this passion in someone else, someone you admired, someone you loved, and that passion rubbed off on you. You didn't think twice about being a Packer fan, you saw the passion of your parents and peers and their passions was contagious, it became a part of who you are.

Take any passion you have or want, trace it back to the beginning and I'm betting all of them grew or were instilled by someone else you loved or respected who had that same passion too – they displayed how great that passion was and made you want that for yourself.

That's how you got your passion as a Packer fan, or whatever your passion is, now let's talk about how you display your passion as a Packer fan.

When you are truly passionate about it consumes a healthy portion of what you think about, what you talk about, what you read about.

The first page you turn to when you get your Milwaukee Journal Sentinel is to the Sports page, the first website you visit when you get a break at work is ESPN, the app you open on your phone when you are sitting in a waiting room is Bleacher Report Team Stream to catch up on what's happening in Packer world. It doesn't matter if it's during the season or offseason, it doesn't matter if it's the injury report or trade rumors, probably on a daily basis you set aside time to read about the Packers. No one forces you to do it, because it's something you are passionate about.

It doesn't matter if you are standing around in the back of church over coffee and donuts, around the proverbial bubbler at work, or while the dentist is digging around in your mouth, your small talk is filled with Green Bay Packers. It's what you know best, it's what you are passionate about. No one has to twist your arm to get your opinion on whether Dom Capers should keep his job, it's not work to talk about the Packers because it's your passion.

And if you are truly a passionate fan, there is little you will not sacrifice for your Packers. You will move heaven and earth to make sure your schedule allows you to be free for the 4 hours a week the Packers are playing. Without even thinking about it, you will spend your money on a nice TV to watch the game, or even better to go to a game and experience Lambeau once a year. You don't think twice about spending money and time to throw a party to get together with like-minded passionate Packer fans. You won't think twice about buying a jersey of next year's first round pick. You don't ever grumble about the Packers always asking for more of your money and time because it's your passion, and you would sacrifice anything for your passion.

And like I've said before, substitute any passion you have for "Packers" – you love to think about, talk about, read about, sacrifice for your passion.

That's how you got your passion, show your passions, now let's talk about how you share your passion.

Your Packer passion oozes from every pore of your being. It guides and motivates so much of what you think, say, and do. It shows through in the clothes you wear and the tone and tenor of the conversation you have. And so sharing your passion for the Green Bay Packers is not something you could stop, even if you wanted to. It's a natural and integral part of who you are. When you are passionate about something, you share that thing.

So, when you have your own kids, you don't have to think twice about teaching them to be Packer fans. And you don't have to sit them down and put them

through Packer school. You do for your kids the same thing your parents did for you, you invite them to watch your Packer passion. You know that just by being in your presence on Sunday afternoon, your passion is going to rub off on them because they will learn just by watching you enjoy your passion how cool, how fun, how exciting it is to be a Packer fan.

Passion for the Packers is a cool thing. It's an infectious thing. It dictates so much of how you live your life. Your packer fandom is something you just naturally share with the world around you because it is your passion.

Now let's compare that to your passion for Jesus...

Do you ooze the same passion for the Lamb of God as you do the foam cheese hat? Does the body and blood of Christ fill you with an infectious passion like the green and gold? Is the robe of righteousness that Jesus gave you at your baptism your pride and joy like that number 12 jersey?

Are the words of Jesus in his Bible something you carve out any free moment you have to read about, think about, and pray about?

Do the people around you know that if they want to see your passion come out, see you all amped up and excited in conversation, all they have to do is ask about your church or your Savior – no one has to twist your arm to find out what Jesus means for you?

Would you move heaven and earth to make sure you can be in the house of your Lord on a weekly basis? When the hour long service is done, do you feel a little let down because you wish you could be here longer? Would you sacrifice anything, even a second hour on Sunday morning to attend Bible study because you just can't get enough of the Water of Life? Is there no limit to the time or money you would sacrifice in your passion for Jesus?

How does your passion for Jesus compare with your passion for the Green Bay Packers, or art, or health, or wealth, or success, or career, or fill in the blank?

Please understand, *I'm not* saying it is wrong to be Packer fan. *I'm not* saying it is wrong to have passion for things other than Jesus. *I'm not* suggesting the only way to love Jesus is ditch the number 12 jerseys and start wearing only Jesus apparel.

I *am* challenging you to ask yourself, do the people around you know how much you love Jesus? Without ever having to sit them down and teach them about loving Jesus, do you kids know how much you love Jesus by your actions? Do our coworkers know how much you love Jesus? Does the stranger on the street see a love oozing from you that prompts him to wonder what passion in your life make you different?

I want you to ask yourself that because that's what it means to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

Today in the second part of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount Jesus calls us **the salt of the earth** – our passion for Jesus is supposed to be so potent, so active that it changes everything and everyone we come into contact with. That's what salt does, it adds

flavor to the bland and preserves the rotting. Our passion for Jesus, his gospel, his love, is *supposed to* change everything and everyone with whom we come into contact.

Jesus calls us **the light of the world – a city on a hill or a lamp on a stand**.

Without ever having to sit the people in our lives down and say, this is what it means to be a child of God, we are *supposed to*; by our passionate lives of faith *show* them what it means to be a child of God.

Jesus wants our passion for him to be so clear and evident that the people who see us are inspired to want what we have – to glorify our Father in heaven.

So, how does your passion for Jesus compare with your passion as a Packer fan?

This, friends, is what the law feels like... the silence in this room, that feeling you have right now, this is what God's law does. It sets the bar. It tells us just what God expects of followers of Jesus, and when we fail to measure up to that bar, it shuts our mouths. Paul in Romans says that **"whatever the law says, it says it... so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God."**

If you are feeling a bit sheepish right now because you know your passion for Jesus, at least how you display your passion for Jesus, is not nearly as obvious as your passion for the Packers, or any other passion of this world, if that makes you a bit sad and sorry, then you are experiencing the law right now, you are experiencing what it is like to be held accountable to God.

And Jesus makes clear to us today in his second point that law isn't going anywhere. It would be really convenient if God didn't have this standard for his salt and light, but you can't wish God's law away. Heaven and earth may pass away, **but "not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen"** from God's law will disappear.

It would be really nice if after we came to faith in Jesus, God would lower the bar a little bit so that maybe we could get a little closer to it, but **"anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven."**

This is God's clear Law that Jesus is preaching today on that mountainside... But that's not all that Jesus had to say about the law today.

Jesus not only said that none of the law was going away, he also said that he was here to fulfill the law.

We have a God who knew that if he held us to his standards after the fall into sin, he knew that we would come up short, every single time, in every single way. So, what did do? He didn't just say, "Try harder, do better, figure it out!"

What did our God, who knew that his law had to stand if he was to remain just and fair, yet also didn't want to punish us for it, what did that God do?

He sent someone to fulfill the law for us.

Jesus in this portion on the Sermon on the Mount is saying, this is how you get into the Kingdom of Heaven, there are two options.

Option 1: Be perfectly passionate for me all the time. Keep every single letter and stroke of the pen in the law. Be better than the Pharisees and teachers of the law

(people who prided themselves on their outward keeping of God's law). Do that, and you will get into heaven.

It doesn't take too long to see that option 1 is not an option for us. And so Jesus, through his life, what he would do after this sermon presents us with a second option.

Option 2: Look to someone other than yourself to fulfill the law for you.

This is why Jesus came. Jesus knew the only time the Law of God could be set aside was after it had been perfectly and completely fulfilled. He came so that God's law could stand, *and* so that you and I, who have broken God's law, could be forgiven.

That's the passion God had for you. That's the passion Jesus has for you. That even though we fail to measure up to the letter of the law in so many and varied ways, he became the Law for us – he fulfilled the Law for us. He obeyed his Father.

Jesus was the salt of the earth who changed everything and everyone he came into contact with – because we could not.

Jesus was the light of the world who by his passionate loving and living showed the people he rubbed shoulders with what it means to be a child of God.

Jesus is the one whose righteousness surpassed that of the Pharisees and teachers of the Law, and he did it all for us, so that he could be the God who is just (who holds himself to his own rules) and the God who justifies (the God who declares guilty people “not guilty” because he was so passionate about loving us).

Maybe your passion is a little short of God's bar. Maybe the passion is there but you just need a bit more encouragement to let the passion you feel inside show on the outside as salt and light.

Either way, there is only one way to get and share a passion for Jesus... and that is more Jesus... more time drinking from the water of life, more time eating from the bread of life, more time in the presence of the infectious passion our God has for us. He wants to share his passion with us so that we, motivated and taught by his passion will share that passion with others as salt and light.