

KAILUA CHRISTIAN CHURCH
SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 2026
SERMON: "THE RIGHTEOUS SUPERBOWL"
REV. IRENE WILLIS HASSAN
SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 5:13-20

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13 "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.

14 "You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

17 "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. 18 For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. 19 Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 20 For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

Sermon: The Righteous Superbowl

Today, let's talk about "righteousness." Jesus says in this passage that our righteousness has to surpass that of the teachers of the law to enter the Kingdom of Heaven, which makes it feel pretty important to know what He actually means.

That's harder than it sounds. The closest synonym the dictionary gives us for righteousness is "good," which isn't very helpful. "Good" is vague. It's slippery. And most of the time, people genuinely believe they are being good.

In an argument, both people usually think they are the good one and the other person is wrong. "Good" is subjective, easy to self-assign, and rarely examined unless someone forces us to slow down and look at it. So if righteousness is just "being good," that's not much of a measuring stick at all.

So to get at what Jesus might mean, let's talk about the Super Bowl, which is today.

I've mentioned before that I bartended through most of my 20s to supplement college, graduate school, and my early jobs in social services. Because of that, I had the strange privilege of bartending Super Bowl events in two different cities when their teams were playing, and the experiences could not have been more different.

I lived in New Orleans in 2010 when the Saints won the Super Bowl, and then in Seattle in 2015 when the Seahawks lost. And the contrast had very little to do with the score.

In New Orleans, the expectation was loss. The Saints were proud just to be there, for once, but nobody really believed quarterback Drew Brees could take down Peyton Manning and the Colts. The morning of the game, my manager announced that we would be pouring free Miller Lite drafts every time the Saints scored a touchdown. He did this for two reasons: to keep morale up for an inevitably doomed team, and because he assumed it would not cost him much.

The city was bracing for a massacre.

Instead, the Saints absolutely crushed the Colts. My arm was sore from pouring beer. Mardi Gras was happening at the same time, and after the game the whole bar poured into the streets to celebrate. Drew Brees was tossing beads from the Saints float. I am wearing the ones I caught from him today. It was a beautiful moment for the city, even if it was a financially painful one for my manager and his Miller Lite kegs.

Seattle was a very different story.

The Seahawks had won the year before, and the city fully expected to do it again. There was confidence, bordering on entitlement, in the air. No free beer. No hedging. The Seahawks were going to crush the Patriots.

They did not.

And people lost it.

One woman sat at the bar with all her credit cards spread out, audibly cycling through the numbers like a nervous tic. A group of guys got into a fight in the bathroom over cocaine and we had to call the police. People were yelling, throwing things, breaking bottles. It was a terrible day, not because the Seahawks lost, but because of how the fans unraveled.

I point out these two experiences because I am convinced that if the Saints had lost in 2010, New Orleans still would have celebrated making it that far. Drew Brees still would have tossed beads. The city would have stayed itself. I cannot imagine cocaine-fueled

brawls or nervous breakdowns erupting in that bar if the outcome had gone the other way.

Which brings us back to Jesus.

Jesus describes righteousness as “salt and light.” Salt enhances flavor, yes, but more importantly, it preserves. It slows rot. Light makes things visible. It keeps us from stumbling around in the dark.

Neither of those images really maps onto the word “good.” Good is subjective, fleeting, and dependent on taste, opinion, or circumstance.

What salt and light do map onto is *integrity*.

Salt maintains the integrity of food. Light maintains the integrity of safety. Integrity is what keeps things from falling apart when pressure is applied.

In Seattle that day, there was no salt. Nothing to preserve people’s sense of self when disappointment hit. And there was no light, no steadiness, no clarity. People unraveled because their identity could not survive the loss.

New Orleans had integrity even before the win. There was a grounded sense of who they were that did not depend on the scoreboard. And when joy came, it did not turn into chaos. It turned into celebration.

So when Jesus says our righteousness has to surpass that of the teachers of the law, I do not think He is asking us to be more correct, more rule-following, or even more good. I think He is asking us to be more whole.

Integrity is who you are when things do not go your way. It is what is left when you do not get the win, the affirmation, or the outcome you expected. It is the consistency between what you say you value and how you actually behave under pressure.

That is where salt and light come in.

Salt preserves us when fear, anger, or disappointment threaten to rot us from the inside out. Light tells the truth about where we are so we do not keep tripping over the same things. Integrity does not make us perfect, but it does make us honest.

And that brings us back to righteousness.

Righteousness, the way Jesus uses the word, is not moral superiority. It is steadiness. It is being so rooted in love, humility, and trust in God that the world does not knock you off balance every time something goes sideways.

Jesus is not asking us to be impressive. He is asking us to be reliable. To be people whose presence preserves what is good around us, and whose lives offer enough light that others do not have to stumble quite so much.

That kind of righteousness is not flashy. But it changes the room.
It changes the city.
And it changes us.

Discuss:

Think about a recent disappointment or unmet expectation. What did it reveal about what was holding you steady, or what wasn't?