**Thesis:** Laws can be used for good or evil, depending on how they’re used. Some of us may be rule followers who love laws, while others may find laws to be restrictive and threats to our freedom. Understanding the purpose of God’s law is crucial to understanding God’s heart. The apostle Paul says in *Galatians 3:23 Before the coming of this faith, we were held in custody under the law, locked up until the faith that was to come would be revealed. 24 So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith. 25 Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian.”* God’s law acted as a guardian, leading people away from sin. But once Jesus came, there was no need for a guardian because the law was completely fulfilled as a new covenant of grace took its place.

**Introduction:** Welcome to The Jesus Podcast, a year of stories showcasing the depth of Christ’s love and the glory of God’s truth. I’m \_\_\_\_ your host from Pray.com. It’s great to have you here today. Be sure to take a second and follow the podcast so you don’t miss out on any of these exciting stories!

**Context:** Our miraculous story for today takes place immediately following our story from last time. After Jesus causes a scene in the synagogue for healing on the Sabbath, he’s invited to the home of a Pharisee to share a meal. But this act of hospitality was only a facade for a trap, yet another attempt to catch Jesus in his words. But if we’ve learned anything about Jesus, it’s that he always has a plan to redeem even the most deplorable of situations. What follows is a story filled with the relatable silent struggles of a Gentile servant, bold questions from the cutting edge Rabbi meant to minister to the head and heart, and deep hatred from the ever-lost Pharisees who continue to push back against Jesus’ messianic mission. And at the heart of it all is another beautiful miracle - another instance of Jesus’ compassionate heart, pursuing love, and divine powers.

**Message:** From the streets, to the synagogue, to private homes, Jesus lived his life in perfect alignment to the Father’s will. If we think about it long enough, we can probably think of examples where we act differently depending on where we are or who we’re with. But Jesus’ character never changes. Whether he was with the disciples, preaching to thousands, or playing mental ping pong with religious leaders, his heart was always the same and the words he spoke never wavered from the truth. But one might wonder why Jesus would accept an invitation given to him from Pharisees who had revealed their hand of opposition to Jesus. It seems clear when we read through the Bible that their obstinance was the very kindling that led to the wildfire of their persecution against Jesus and the disciples. And Jesus was well aware of this. In fact, he depended on it. He knew that he would be rejected. And he knew that this rejection would be the platform that gave way to the cries for crucifixion. He knew their disdain was the catalyst for their demands for the cross. But he also knew that the cross was the very place he needed to be, where he would willingly take the sins of the world and allow the Father to pour out his wrath in order to put our sins to death.

Yet knowing what lay ahead, that didn’t stop Jesus from continuing to love these people who so deeply hated him. Jesus didn’t view people as his enemies. And even if he did, he was the one who taught that we must love our enemies. Jesus knew that the Pharisees' minds were clouded. And though he rebuked them for this, it was always in his heart to see them repent, turn from their sins, and follow him. We see this happen with the Pharisee Nicodemus, who meets with Jesus in secret one night to learn about the Rabbi, only to wind up honoring the slain Messiah and burying him with reverence and respect. Jesus knew that nobody was too far gone in their sin to turn back to the loving arms of the Father.

And while these Pharisees may not indicate any desire to follow Jesus, there was one person there who Jesus knew would. In our story, we were introduced to Mattan, a Gentile servant who had suffered from a certain sickness for years. Though he had tried to heed the religious leaders’ advice of sacrifices, offerings, and cleansing in the hopes of being healed, none of it seemed to work. But to his delight, that would change on this special night, because the Healer was in attendance tonight. But what’s really neat about this miracle is that Mattan hadn’t come to Jesus to look for healing. Instead, Jesus found him. Despite Jesus knowing this was all a setup to try and incriminate him, Jesus was willing to enter into this metaphorical den of thieves to save this man and set him free.

That truth should radiate in our hearts. There is nowhere that Jesus isn’t willing to go to save us and set us free. His love knows no bounds. No place is off limits.

As David says in *Psalm 139:7 “Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? 8 If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.”*

We could run as far away from God as possible, and he would still be there, waiting for us to turn back to him. We don’t have to back track and earn our way back. He’s waiting for us, with us, and welcomes us the minute we call out to him. He finds us in our sins and sets us free.

This is radically different from the character of the Pharisees. They were the ones who were supposed to be instructed and guiding God’s people, but their ways of legalism and lawful lifestyles had become an obstacle for love. But rules, especially God’s rules, should never be a hindrance in showing love to others. Which is exactly the point Jesus is trying to make. If they had known the heart of the Father, they would have known what God’s word actually meant. For us, we have the Spirit who gives us an understanding of Scripture. He reveals the true meaning of God’s word to our hearts. He illuminates God’s character and nature to us. Anyone can read the Bible, but we need the Spirit to cause us to come alive to it. So take a lesson from the Pharisees. Be careful about hardening your heart against God. Be open to having your understanding grow and change as you learn from others, but most importantly, as you learn from the Spirit. Christ’s ministry was all about bringing understanding. The people who were transformed were the people who were open to actually changing.

The apostle Paul says in *Ephesians 4:17 “So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. 18 They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts.”*

Though Paul’s words were directed at the Gentiles, the Pharisees had great need of it in times like this. They had become lost in their own way of thinking, darkening their understanding. And for all their striving to get close to God, they were just separating themselves from the abundant life with him that Jesus came to give. It was their ignorance for the true meaning of God’s word that led to their hardened hearts that rejected the Word who was in the beginning. So take that as a warning and an encouragement. Ask God to soften your heart so that you might receive his word like a seed planted in fertile soil.

Watching Jesus’ ministry over time is a fascinating experience. As each story unfolds, we begin to see how each one is woven into the next. Jesus goes from teaching the crowds, to setting himself and the disciples apart to teach them a lesson, to teaching in the synagogue, to healing a servant. Each step of the plan plays into the next. And every single time we see Jesus prepared to accomplish the will of the Father. It’s like watching Jesus build a house: Setting a foundation, building up the framework, working until the house is complete. As we continue through the miracles of the Messiah, let’s praise God together for the perseverance of Jesus, who started a good work and was devoted to seeing it completed.