**Thesis:** Do you view Christianity as just a set of rules to follow? Does it feel like following Jesus is a constraint on life? The gospel message is one of freedom. Jesus frees us from the bondage of the law of Moses and gives us the new perfect law of liberty. Those who live according to the law will be judged by the law. But we read in *Romans 6: 14 “For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace.”* Understanding God’s heart is crucial for us to live out our faith as obedient disciples.

**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. I’m so happy you’re here with us! As we look at more miracles of the Messiah, be sure to follow the podcast on your favorite platform as we continue to advance the gospel message together.

**Context:** Our story today falls on a Sabbath, the Jewish day of rest. But this Sabbath would be unlike most. What for most would have been a quiet day was met with unrest. Not unrest caused by Jesus who freely allowed his disciples to pluck grain to satiate their hungry bellies, or who healed a man with a withered hand as one who loved his neighbor as himself. The unrest on this day formed in and flowed from the hearts of the Pharisees and scribes, the religious leaders, who thought they knew were all there was to know about God. As their understanding of God was challenged by Jesus working against their rigid ways, their hearts became cold, hard, and bitter against the one person they needed most to find the righteousness they spent each day striving for. As we listen to our story today, we might even find ourselves challenged, too. But challenges can be good if we respond with humility and receptivity to the Lord of lords and King of kings.

**Message:** The idea of the Sabbath can be found very early on in Scripture. In Genesis 1 and 2, God speaks his creation into existence, finding delight in each new masterpiece as he declares them good. And at the end of his work on the seventh day, God rests. Not because he needed to, but to enjoy the grand displays of his glory manifested through his handiwork. As an extension of his own rest, God gives man the privilege of Sabbath rest. Six days of work and labor awaiting a seventh day to rest and enjoy God’s creation with him. But the Pharisees had long forgotten God’s intentions for this holy day. Rather than seeing this day as a blessing to spend time with God, they had contorted it by imposing rules and regulations to make the day about themselves. They added to God’s law to bolster their sense of self-righteousness. This was a common theme for the religious leaders that we call legalism. The idea was rooted in thinking one could be more holy if they not only abided by the law of Moses, but showcased their spiritual discipline by creating even more constraints. If the law drew a metaphorical line in the sand, the Pharisees would take a step back and draw their own.

But for all of their efforts, the Pharisees’ legalism was only leading to more bondage. In their attempts to attain holiness, the religious leaders added to the weight of the law. Not only did this not bring them the righteousness they thought it would, it was actually pulling them away from God. The problem had gotten so bad that they weren’t even able to recognize Jesus as the Anointed One, the promised Messiah, who came just as the prophets foretold. They had added so much to the word of God that they blocked their own view of what God was really telling them through it. Which is unfortunate, because the one they plotted against was the Christ who was leading God’s people to freedom and true righteousness. Righteousness that was never meant to be found through adherence to the law. Righteousness that could only be bestowed upon those who received the immense mercy and grace of God through the Son.

Continuing in *Romans 6*, the apostle Paul shares a few verses later, *“17 But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance. 18 You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.”*

Only Christ can bring us true freedom from sin. No amount of effort or good deeds can undo our evil works. And only Christ can place his righteousness upon us so that we might be presented as blameless before God.

For this reason, we don’t have to fear man’s judgment. If we’re obedient to Christ, it doesn’t matter what others think about how we live. Some people might be critics of our lifestyle when following Jesus, but we shouldn’t let the chains of others’ judgment bind us and hold us back from experiencing the freedom that Jesus gives to us. As the Pharisees berate Jesus and his disciples for plucking and eating grain in the fields on the Sabbath, Jesus reminds them that the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath, and that he was Lord over the Sabbath. He was the one who decided what was lawful and what wasn’t lawful on this day of rest. He knew the heart of the Father and encouraged the disciples to enjoy the day for what it was always meant to be - a connecting point with God.

Frustrated with Jesus' bold assertion, the Pharisees follow him and the disciples as they head to the synagogue to hear the teaching for the day. Their intentions were clear: To trap Jesus. Seeing a man with a withered hand and knowing his pattern of performing healing miracles, they ask Jesus if it’s lawful for him to heal on the Sabbath, arguably the greatest work you could perform on a day meant for rest.

It’s at this point that Jesus demonstrates God’s heart. Using recognizable imagery to their day, he questions the people of the synagogue if they wouldn’t rescue a sheep from their flock who had fallen into a pit on the Sabbath. With no response from the people who couldn’t dispute Jesus’ question, the Lord turns to the man with a withered hand and commands him to stretch out his hand. At that moment, the hand was healed, just as good as the other. In breaking the Pharisees’ Sabbath rules, he was teaching the people about the loving heart of the Father, who wasn’t in the habit of allowing man made rules interfere with his willingness and desire to care for His children. He was showing them, and shows us, that the law of Christ that hinges on loving others was greater than the law of Moses.

As followers of Jesus, we live by the law of Christ and his love. While we should never break one of God’s commands, we also need to be mindful of where we’ve added to God’s law through our own moral standards that haven’t been set by God. Though it may be hard to have that type of introspection, it’s good for us to ask ourselves where we may have fallen victim to the legalistic mindset. Have we let our own rules and constraints be a reason not to show love to others? For us, it may not come in the same form as Sabbath rules that prohibited one from moving a chair through the dirt or lifting anything heavier than a dried fig leaf. Maybe for us it looks like limiting the type of people we’re willing to spend time with or help. Or perhaps it looks like judging others for what they eat, drink, or wear. Whatever it is, if it prevents us from loving people like Jesus, we should turn back to the word and be reminded of what God is calling us to and how he wants us to live.

The old covenant of the law had its purpose. God used it as a means to protect his people and instruct them in holy patterns. But it was only meant to play that part for a time, until he sent the Messiah who would bring a better covenant. A promise of salvation and righteousness that came from acknowledging our need for a Savior and receiving the One God sent to redeem us.

Jesus was willing to break the religious leaders' rules for the sake of breaking us free from the law. Live in the freedom he offers us, be willing to swim against the current, push back against religiosity to follow God’s heart, and love others with the radical love of Jesus.