

These Cancer ads are shocking and they are meant to be shocking, that's the whole idea of them.

They are meant to shock people into the realisation that smoking is deadly.

But why do people still smoke, surely they have seen these ads, surely they have been shocked.

Well the reason people still smoke is because they have become accustomed to the ads, they have become acclimatised to them, just like frogs will stay in a pot until they die if you warm the water up gradually, but they will hop straight out if its hot water to start with.

Well this is the same as today's parable. This parable is both a shocking parable and many of us have become acclimatised to it.

Today we need to be shocked at this parable once again, like we would have been the first time that you heard it.

See we should be shocked by this parable, it is shocking but not shocking for a bad reason like we would normally associate shock with.

This parable should shock you for good reasons. It is like you leaving your wallet full of cash on a bus in the dodgy area of town. After coming to terms with the fact that you have lost all the cash you front up to the police department to report it lost and find out that someone has handed in the wallet with all the cash there. Completely unexpected.

The background to the parable we see in the beginning of Luke 15, Jesus is eating with tax collector and sinners and the Jewish leaders are shocked that Jesus is doing such a thing.

Upon hearing their shock, Jesus tells three parables about losing things and with each parable the value of what is lost greatly increases.

In the first parable one sheep is lost out of one hundred sheep.

The second parable one coin is lost out of ten coins

And then the third and last parable one child is lost out of two children.

Now the rebellion of the youngest son in this parable would have been unacceptable in Jesus' time.

By asking for his inheritance the son was basically saying, Father I wish you were dead, I no longer want to be part of your family.

It simply was just not done and Jesus telling this parable would have completely shocked his audience .

This child is being extremely rebellious and the father under Jewish law would be able to take his rebellious son to the elders and then his son would be stoned to death Deut 21:18-21.

But the father does something that shocks everyone.

He doesn't take his son to the elders but instead he does the unthinkable and gives his youngest son his entitlement being 1/3 of all that his possession and then his son departs from the family to go live the high life.

Now what would you have done?

Would you have let your son do this? Or would you have punished your Son?

Would you have done as the rebellious son did? Would you have basically told your father I wish you were dead?

Well we all have done as the rebellious son has done.

We have all done the same to our heavenly Father, we have all said to Him, no God, I want to live my own way.

See what the younger son does is no different to what Adam and Eve did back in Gen 3, they said, no God, I want to follow the ways of the world the ways of the devil, not your ways God.

Well sure enough to know ones shock the son's money runs out, he's left with nothing and then a severe famine hits the country that he is staying in.

The son is shocked that his money has run out and he is now shocked that the only work he can find is tending to pigs a very shocking thing for a Jewish person to do.

You can just hear the Pharisees cheering now can't you, the boy has finally got what he deserves, he's wasted all the money now he's forced to work with the lowliest of the animals and now he must eat pig food. Justice has prevailed.

The rebellious Son now comes up with a plan, he works out that his life would be much better as a servant at his Father's house, see he knows that his father is a loving man and treats his servants well, so still putting himself as number one, the rebellious son works out how he may try and save himself.

Now don't get me wrong I don't believe that the son was trying to get back into the family but he was certainly trying to get back to his father presence where I'm sure he would try and use his relationship with his father to get a job after all this boy would not have been trained in being a servant, he has shown that he's not good with money and if there is a severe famine in the neighbouring countries there would have been an influx of skilled workers looking for work.

Now we are just like the rebellious son aren't we, working out how to fix things ourselves, trying to please God by our actions trying to earn our way into God's household.

The Pharisees definitely were, they had created their own set of laws to stop people from breaking God's laws.

Now this in itself is not a bad idea, see if you struggle in an area you may need to put up boundaries to help you with that area, but for the Pharisees they had turned these laws into God's laws and they had made it all about works instead of a relationship with God.

The son returns home to beg for a servant's job in his father's household, and something extremely shocking happens, something that not one of the people who Jesus is speaking too would have expected.

While he is still a long way off the father spots him and runs to greet him.

Now we would think this would be a nice and appropriate reaction, and if you have every spent any time at the arrivals hall of an airport you would notice that this is a very normal reaction, people running to greet each other, hugging, kissing, crying, even jumping into the arms of each other.

But for Jesus' hearers this reaction was shocking very shocking. It was extremely undignifying for an elderly Jewish man to run, this just did not happen, and the greeting of a kiss was reserved for close friends and family members only. The father's reactions to his rebellious son was one of love for his family member.

Jesus' audience would have not expected this at all, how could the father do this, the son had said to his father I wish you were dead and I was no longer part of your family. The hearers would have expected that the father would have rightfully turned his back on his son.

But no the father shocks everyone by telling his servant to go get the best robe, put a ring on his finger and put sandals on his feet.

Now the best robe in the house would belong to the father and the ring would have most likely been a family signet ring and servants did not normally wear sandals but instead would carry them for their master and put them on their feet.

The father's actions shows everyone that this rebellious son has been reinstated as a rightful son of the father. The father did not want to have his son as a servant but instead as a son.

The father orders the servants to kill the fattened calf and arrange a feast, now the fattened calf would have been big enough to feed the whole village and noble families would usually invite the whole village to a big party for special occasions, like a wedding or a child reaching adulthood.

The father wants the whole village to know that his son has returned and that he is welcomed back into the family.

He is not hiding his son as one would have expected him to do, after all his rebellious son had brought a great amount of shame on the family, so much so that he rightfully could have had his son stoned to death under Jewish law for the shame that he brought to the family.

This would have blown the minds of the Pharisees, remember they have had a go at Jesus for eating with tax collector and sinners.

The Pharisees would have realised that the rebellious son in the story are the sinners and tax collectors that Jesus is eating with.

They would have been being completely shocked that a wealthy Jewish man would do such a thing as welcoming such a rebellious son back into the family, they would have been hoping that he would have gotten what he deserved and that the father would have disowned him and sent him away.

They would have not been extremely shocked as they now realised that Jesus is saying that these sinners and tax collector who He is eating with are actually welcome into God's family.

Well the Pharisees day is about to get a whole lot worst.

Enter in the older brother, the Pharisees are going yes someone who we can possibly associate with, maybe the older brother can talk some sense into the father cause clearly the father has lost his mind.

“Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. **26** So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. **27** ‘Your brother has come,’ he replied, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’

28 “The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. **29** But he answered his father, ‘Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends.**30** But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!’

The brothers reaction would not have shocked anyone, this is a reasonable response given the circumstances, the Pharisees definitely would have thought so.

The older brother has a point doesn't he, after all his younger brother had wished his father was dead, he had wanted nothing to do with the family, he has wasted his father's money and now that all the money has run out he has returned, why would you be happy?

But look at how the father responds,

'My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. **32** But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' "

Once again the father shocks everyone, he responds out of love and joy, his son who was dead is alive, there is no question about it, this calls for a big party, why wouldn't you celebrate.

But see the older brother is jealous, he's worried about his inheritance, he doesn't want to share anymore of it with his brother, even though his inheritance is secure, his entitlements haven't changed, he is still not happy that his brother has returned.

He thinks that just because he has stayed at home and obeyed his father he rightfully deserves his inheritance. See the older brother thinks that it is by works that he receives the inheritance, and he is complaining that despite all his hard work he doesn't even get a goat to share with his friends.

The shocking thing is that oldest son has also got it all wrong, the inheritance from his father has nothing to do with working for it, he does not deserve the inheritance based on what he has done at all.

He like his brother, only deserves the inheritance because of their father's actions. The inheritance is a gift from their father not based on what they have done.

Imagine what the Pharisees are thinking now.

They have been completely shocked at the rebellious son's actions, blown away by the father's reaction and having associated themselves with the older brother in this story they think that they have done everything right, they have upheld God's laws but still they get it so wrong.

And I think this is something that we struggle with today, I know I do.

We compare ourselves against other people and say no they couldn't be saved, they are too bad.

For example

Hitler

Bin Laden

Pol Pot

a serial child sex abuser

a Muslim terrorist

or how about something closer to home

someone who has murder your family member.

Can these people be saved?

Should we take the gospel to these people?

Would you be happy if these people were saved?

And the hardest question of all

Would you rejoice at their salvation?

These are tough questions to answer honestly.

But what this passage shows us is that all people can be saved, as it is not our actions that determine if we can be saved.

The rebellious son would certainly have fallen into the my list of bad people.

He wished the death of his own father

He associated with prostitutes.

He squandered away his father's property.

The son would have normally been an outcast, disowned by his family and friends.

Definitely not deserving of salvation.

The question for us is who will we be like in the story?

We have already seen that we are all like the rebellious son as we have all turned from God's ways to follow our own desires.

But thankfully God has done something about that and sent his son to die for us, paying the price for us and allowing us the freedom of being able to come back into his family.

So then will you be shocking like the father, joyful and wanting all people to come back to God, or will we be like the older brother who is jealous of his father's love for his lost son, not wanting his brother to return and share in the inheritance.

My prayer is that you will be shocking like the father is and I would like to finish by telling the story of the impact that being shocking can have on people.

Gary Ridgway is one of America's worst criminals, he is convicted of a large number of shocking murders, Ridgway showed no remorse and showed no emotion at all in his hearing.

At his sentencing hearing the court allowed the family members of his victims to address him and the court, a number of people gave gripping heartfelt addresses telling of their loss and what impact Ridgway had had on their families, Ridgway sat there stone-faced during all of the addresses showing no emotion at all as the victim's relatives mock and condemned him, "he's an animal, I wish for him to have a long suffering cruel death, he's going to go to hell and that where he belongs"

then Robert Rule the father of one of the victims approached the microphone and said this

“Mr Ridgway, there are people here who hate you, I am not one of them, you have made it difficult to live up to what I believe and that is what God says to do and that’s to forgive, you are forgiven sir.

At this Gary Ridgway who has shown no emotion at all during his trial or to this point during his sentencing, broke down and sobs.

See what Gary Ridgway did was extremely shocking, he ruined the lives of many people and he rightfully deserved the angry and hostility that he got, but what Robert Rule did was even more shocking, he showed the same love that God shows to us

While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.
This is truly shocking