

LIBERTY PARK INN®

A Syndicated Column

Name: Only A Ticket Home

By: David Henry © 2012

“Hi, Aaron,” I said. “You’re an attorney. What do you think about the 17 inmates in North Carolina who were wrongly convicted and then later released from prison with no more help to get back on their feet than a ticket home?”

“I read about that, David,” Aaron replied. “But I have to say that I’m not surprised by it.”

“Why,” I asked?

“Our legal system is not set up to help people. People may think that our legal system is trying to take lawbreakers and reform them and transform them into productive members of society, but that’s just not true. Our legal system is set up to convict and punish lawbreakers. That’s all. Not only do they not try to reform the lawbreakers, but in many ways they are doing the exact opposite of what really needs to be done to reform these people. The current 70% re-arrest rate is evidence that fairly shouts out that truth.”

“That’s a terrible statistic,” I replied with some amazement.

“Yes,” Aaron continued. “It is. But I know of even worse stories than what was reported in that article. For example, I know of a jail that does absolutely nothing to help people get restarted when they are released. The inmates don’t even get a ticket home. And there is no public transportation nearby and the jail is located miles away from any populated areas.”

“That’s not surprising,” I replied. “People don’t want a jail near their house. It lowers their property values.”

“That’s true,” Aaron replied. “But frankly I don’t believe the legal system really cares what happens to these inmates. Recently, that same jail released an inmate who had served his time and he had no place to go or anyone to pick him up, so he stole a car out of the parking lot. They just re-arrested him and put him back in jail again. How did that help the

lawbreaker or society?”

“That’s interesting,” I responded.

Aaron continued, “The really sad thing about the injustices we’re seeing is that the people who are wrongly convicted and are then later exonerated, when they get released from jail, they actually get less help to start their life over again than the people who were convicted of an actual crime.”

“Isn’t there anything that can be done to help these innocent people,” I asked?

“Not much,” Aaron replied.

“According to that article there are ten states that provide some assistance to these people, but most states don’t provide any assistance at all. These innocent people are pretty much on their own.”

“I just thought of something, Aaron,” I said. “The bible talks about this subject of helping people in jail.”

“Oh, really,” Aaron asked? “What does it say?”

I answered, “Jesus told his followers to visit those who are in prison and to provide food and other assistance to the needy. And he says he will reward the ones who do this.”

“Hey, I’m not a Christian, but I think that’s great,” Aaron replied.

“Unfortunately,” I continued, “most Christians are not doing anything in the area of jail ministry.”

“Maybe,” Aaron commented thoughtfully, “this lack of obedience on the part of Christians is one of the reasons we are having so little success in seeing lawbreakers reformed.”

“It could be,” I replied. “In our churches we have a lot of good people doing a lot of good things. And I’m grateful for that. But when it comes to ministering to the ones who are in prison, most Christians are not involved.”

“That’s too bad, David,” Aaron replied. “Since about 60% of the American people are professing Christians, can you imagine what would happen if a significant percentage of those people would actually take the bible seriously and would help out in this area. Who

knows, it might even be enough to solve the problems we are facing in our legal system.”

“Maybe it would,” I replied. Then I paused for a moment and said, “There are some good people who are doing jail ministry. But the truth is that the problems are so big that the good work being done by these people is dwarfed by the magnitude of the problems.”

“So how can we get more people involved,” Aaron asked?

“Well, Aaron,” I replied, “I can only speak for myself. But that’s why I let Chaplain Bill use one of our conference rooms. He is a court chaplain and he trains pastors and other people in how to get involved in this important area of ministry.”

“That’s good,” Aaron replied, “And I’ve met him. He seems like a good man.”

I continued, “Chaplain Bill really cares about these inmates. He visits them in jail. And if they don’t have family or friends to help them when they get out, he picks them up when they are released and helps them get food and clothes and a place to stay. He tries to help them get established again so they can become healthy productive members of our society.”

“Well,” Aaron replied. “I’m all for that.”

“Me too,” I agreed.

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The USA Today thought this issue was important enough to give it front page coverage. The author agrees with their assessment. We desperately need to fix the flaws in our legal system. And getting Christians to do what Jesus commanded his followers to do is a good starting point.

Liberty Park Inn® is a syndicated column about issues and current events featuring conversations in an imaginary hotel. You may contact the author through his website at www.libertyparkinn.com.