

Tough Question: "Isn't Belief in God Just a Form of Escapism?"

Hi There. My name is Tim Perry, Pastor of Spiritual Discovery at Christ Community Church, welcoming you to Week 4 of "Tough Questions."

I'm wondering if you have ever seen one of these? Check that out. Yeah, it's a "Get out of Jail Free" card from the game, Monopoly. This is helping me ask our tough question of this week. Sceptics of Christianity and of faith in general have often asked the question, "Isn't Christianity or belief in God just another form of Escapism – just another 'Get out of Jail Free' card – if you will?" Let's take a look at this.

So this week in Project 4:4, we have just read about the Exodus. Isn't the Exodus the ultimate "Get out of Jail Free" scenario? Think about it: God's people are stuck in Egypt enslaved to the Egyptians. They are experiencing captivity over here and because they are captives, they are being oppressed so they cry out to God. God hears their cries and delivers them out of Egypt and heads them toward the Promised Land. Over here, they are free! They are free to know God. They didn't really know God when they were in captivity, they had just heard about Him and spread rumors about Him. And they are free now to follow God. And so instead of this experience of captivity they now have freedom. It seems a little like here's the Old Testament "Get out of Jail Free" card experience. God's people are let go. They are out. They can do whatever they want now, right?

Well that's not exactly what happens based on how God works the Exodus because if you remember, there was this little incident at the Red Sea that was a part of how God delivered them. In the Red Sea, God dealt with their enemies. Pharaoh's army was pursuing them and was going to take them back, and God said "No, you are going to drown in the sea." "I'm going to give your freedom from your enemies." But along with their time in captivity they had picked up the influence of a lot of idols. Those idols also had to be dealt with. And so it could be possible for the Israelites to be free but still be chained to these idols, still be intimidated by their enemies. God's way of freedom is to bring them totally out. But God's freedom isn't an absolute freedom like we think about it. God frees people so that they then can have a relationship with Him. Free to follow – free to be everything that God intended you to be in the first place. Now this is very different from let's say modern naturalism's concepts of what escapism is all about. Let's look at this next.

Naturalism is the world-view that has the biggest problem with the idea of redemption. Naturalism according to guys like Freud claims that religion is only the desire to escape death – that everything about faith and what we want to believe about God just comes from an innate sense that death is bad and we want to avoid death somehow. So we make up stories like the Exodus where God comes on the scene and He's our hero or we make up ideas like heaven and hell because that will somehow give us hope. Well, naturalism teaches that there is no afterlife to hope for. Naturalism teaches that there is no God to be accountable to. So, in essence, naturalism is saying, "Relax there is nothing to escape. There's no problem. There's no real enemy. There's no real problem with death. Death is just passing from life to non-existence on the other side."

Well, Christianity teaches a very different idea of what redemption is all about. In Christianity, there is something real to be avoided and there is real freedom to enjoy. That's why it's not just a sophisticated kind of escapism. First of all, there really is something to avoid in the Christian world-view. There is something to avoid about death and that is that death really is consequential. It's not just accidental. Freud would say that the fear of death is just some imaginary cage that we put ourselves in so that we take God seriously, but the Christian world-view says that death is eternal not accidental. Death is consequential because we are sinful and because of our sin we die. Death isn't just the ceasing of our heartbeat so that we get buried and stuck in a hole. And the other thing is that God is real in Christianity. He's not only loving where He gives us opportunity to be forgiven, but He's also just and He's not going to keep that opportunity open forever for us. Here and now in this lifetime, we have to deal with God. We

have to deal with what it means to be accountable to Him and His standards. In some ways, Christianity is realistic about the existence of God and maybe in Naturalism that's where we are actually avoiding God borrowing from Escapism. Well, then the last thing is this freedom. It is real. There is something real to be experienced in the gospel of Jesus. God through Jesus faces death for us and pays the penalty, the ultimate penalty, for it. He pays the consequences of what our sin is through His own death. And so our belief in Him leads to real freedom.

And so as we are thinking about this, I just want to give the choice back over to you. What seems more realistic – Christianity - which has an answer for the consequential nature of sin? Christianity - which does accept the reality of God - that He is loving and just? Or could it be, could it be that our Escapists are actually those who believe Naturalism - who are trying to escape the real danger of what death is all about? Trying to avoid the reality of a personal God? The choice is yours.

So, if the atheists are right, we can safely tear up our "Get out of Jail Free" cards. We don't need them. However, if the possibility of God is convincing to you at all, then I think we better ask a really tough question about who the real escapist is. We can't flee from God when God is going to hold us accountable for our choices. If salvation seems like a "Get out of Jail Free" card, we may just want to take it and ask what the fine print is and relate to God who longs for our freedom and has paid for it.

Hey, if you found this interesting and you have got questions, hit the Comment down there and let's dialog about it. Thanks for being with me. Bye now.