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Interview: Keagan, an Agnostic Atheist (part 1)

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For The King - Rocky Ramsey

Today, on the For The King podcast, I am joined with one of my good friends. Keagan and I met at college during our undergraduate careers and we soon became friends doing lots of random things together. Today Keagan walks us through what has caused his departure from the Christian faith into his claimed position of Agnostic Atheism. Tune in and hear Keagan espouse his beliefs and walk us through why he ended up where he is today. Thank you for listening! Please check out Keagan's podcast!

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Transcript

[MUSIC] >> Yeah, I know. >> All right, you ready for this? >> Non-profit management. >> I'm going to introduce you.

>> Yeah, sure. I'm ready for it. Go ahead.

>> Ready for this? All right. Okay. Hello for the King listeners.

I am joined today with one of my good friends Keegan. Me and him met down- >> Yeah. >> Hello.

He is here. I don't have a fake friend. I met this guy down in IU Bloomington for my undergrad.

Me and him were both in a ministry together and we actually just became good friends. We did this thing called C Store Reviews. That was a big bonding moment for us our freshman year.

We would go to some of the campus stores that would sell food for students, and we would try the stuff and put it on Facebook video. I mean, they got like 50 plus views. They were popping off a little bit.

They're pretty funny. If you guys dig deep enough in YouTube, you could find it. I don't know.

You could type in C Store Reviews. You might find that stuff. >> They're still out there.

>> They are still out there. We also did Underwater Resource Management together. We got a certificate that- >> Probably that.

>> Scuba diving a lot. Yeah, we take scuba classes together and stuff like that. He was in that program too.

That was how we met and how we would hang out and things like that. He finished up his undergrad the same time I did in a non-profit management at the School of Public and Environmental Affairs there in Bloomington. He has recently been an assessment worker for the Child and Protective Services through the government.

>> Yeah, Department of Child Services. >> Yeah, and now he's job searching for another thing similar to me. I'm job searching as well.

It's a brutal process. This is this guy. I did mention we were in a ministry together.

Keegan actually has some new views surrounding God, religion, the nature of reality, what it means to be a human, those things. He has these views now that are a lot different than when we were hanging out and we're still friends and keep up and stuff and text. Just wanted to pick his brain for you guys to see what other people think.

I don't want this podcast to be an echo chamber where it's just Christians talking to each other and internal conversation. But obviously want critiques of religion being thrown in there. Keegan is going to talk about some of those things today.

Thanks for being on the podcast, Keegan. Can you just walk us through? >> Thank you for having me. >> Yeah.

Just hit on right after college because I still see you and things weren't exactly to that point yet. So what happened after similar to senior year graduation? What caused or started you on a path? Maybe departing from the faith. What would you claim you are now? What title would you put yourself on? >> I was just about to say that.

So I have a wonderful chart and there's Gnostic atheism, there's agnostic atheism, there's Gnostic theist, and there's an agnostic theist. For a while I was an agnostic Christian, I believe that the Christian God was correct, but I don't know for sure. That's where I was for a little bit.

But now I would say I'm an agnostic atheist, which means I don't believe that any God exists, but I don't know for sure. I don't think anyone can know for sure. So that's where I am on that.

Then there's the Gnostic theist, Gnostic atheist, which says the opposite is like, I don't believe a God exists and I know for sure, and I know a God exists and I know for sure that's what that whole thing would be. But I would say I'm an agnostic atheist, but pretty much I left college, went back to my hometown, got a job working investigation and assessment. So I go and I investigate child abuse for the Department of Child Services.

For a while, like for the past three years before that time, through pretty much all through college, I was struggling with these questions with religion in general, but pinpointing Christianity because that's the way I grew up. I grew up Christian. So I struggle with these hard, hard questions and I just didn't have any good answers.

The first big one was evolution and whether or not evolution existed. Eventually got to this point where it's like, yes, evolution exists, but I believe that God was the one doing it. It was like a tool type of thing.

A lot of my hard questions, I would try to relate and twist and do mental gymnastics to try to make it work. I came to this point where I was just like, I need to take a step back because I can't do this anymore. Because I was just feeling pain, like actual anguish in my head.

It was just really hard because I was like, I don't want to ask myself this question. For the longest time, I was like, I don't want to look into this. I don't want to ask myself this question because I was scared of becoming an atheist.

Sure. I was stopping from doing it and eventually I was just like, I can't think about it anymore because if I think about it, I get upset, I get sad, I'm just in pain, I just can't really think about it. No one is giving me really good answers.

I took a step back. I was like, I want to take a step back. I'm going to try and look at it from an objective lens as much as possible and try and take out as much bias as I can.

I'm just going to try and look at the data. I found when I took a step back, I was like, okay. Things started getting clearer and clearer view for me.

It's what it feels like. It was just like I'm out here and the more I stepped away from it, the more I tried to take my emotions away from it. I was just looking at it.

The weirder and weirder things started to sound. I was looking into anthropological reasons for religion. I was looking at evolution and the reasons for that and biological reasons for it.

I just got to this point where I was like, I don't believe this. I was like, I can't. I have too much respect for people in my life who are Christian and who are religious, and who truly believe it and truly practice it.

I have too much respect for that, I have too much respect for myself to act other than what I believe. I could have carried on the act. I know a lot about a lot.

Yeah, a lot and long ago. My dad is a pastor. I could have stayed in it, but I was just like I can't.

I just came to this point where I was like, I need to be honest with myself. I need to be honest with people around me. I was like, I'm an atheist.

I don't believe this. I'm really glad I made that choice. Everyone in my immediate circle still accepts and loves me.

Because that was one of the biggest things I was afraid of saying. I was like, I'm going to say this and it's going to hurt people in my family. It's going to hurt my parents and it's going to hurt my friends.

I'm just... But luckily that all went down pretty well. And here we are. I was just like... trying to find the truth in the world.

I'm just trying to find what it all... Like what the truth is. So that's sort of the long and short of it. You know? The journey.

Cool. So at one point I want to pick out there and get some clarification on... You just said you were just looking into these things. I'm just curious just for the listeners and just for the sake of the journey, what sources were you looking at? Did you look at other religions and their claims? Did you look at Christian apologetics and their claims? Did you look at... I hear you talk... It's just me and you talking.

I hear Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, some of these new atheists and their views. So did they have a big impact on you? Was it purely just the university would teach about evolution and you would just kind of maybe talk to a professor, kind of, you know, what was that like? And what sources? So, yeah, yeah, yeah. My entire life I've been surrounded by apologetics and I've always been really big into natural science.

So growing up I was constantly trying to find either good arguments or facts and evidence that would support my claim. It was pretty much my entire life. I went to the Creation Museum in Kentucky.

I did multiple apologetics courses growing up and my parents were Christians. They're not so much into the apologetics scene anymore, but that whole side of things was pretty much covered for me. And as far as like Christians, as a Christian would be

concerned, not politically, but in the realm of Christianity, I would at the end, I was pretty liberal because it was like the only way for me to like make sense of things in the world, you know? So, you know, my dad and my mom, they were both trying to give me things to look at, you know, as counter-arguments, which would have been, you know, mere Christianity by C.S. Lewis and letters from a skeptic by Greg Boyd and things of that nature.

So I was like, I was looking at those things as well. But I was really diving into things that I had never had the chance to look at from an objective view, which would have been the science and evidence and things like that of it all. So whenever I do research on anything, I always try to use the best sources possible.

These would be, you know, universities, the BBC. PBS is pretty good, too. I mean, I try to use things from either dot gov sites or university sites, you know? That's where I try to get books, too.

As far as listening to atheists, big atheists and stuff like that, that didn't come in until after I moved. That's one of the best. So it was pretty much, yeah, yeah, they didn't really have a big play in that transformation.

I remember watching them when I was younger and being like, wow, these guys don't get anything. Yeah. Yeah.

I was a little bit more close-minded then. But I just got to this point where I was like, I made this choice. I didn't really make a choice.

It just sort of happened where I was like, I can't believe this. I don't believe it. I can't.

It just doesn't make any sense to me. And then I started looking at, you know, Sam Harris, Christopher Hitchens, Richard Dawkins, watching a lot of their things. I've read Christopher Hitchens books and reading more of that.

Because I feel like they provide a lot more insight to things that I had never seen before, if that makes sense. Yeah. So just to make sure I'm hearing you correctly, most of the pull to relinquish your faith was internal conflict, not really external people saying, hey, don't believe in this.

Don't believe it. It's more you were having this internal conflict of it. Like, do I even believe this? And then as you that that is what caused you to go out and search, not people were necessarily like, you know, professors or whatever.

It wasn't really people that were causing doubt, speaking into your life or internal things. Yeah. And because the thing is, is I grew up with a Christianity and my, it's actually Christianity sort of started it all for me because I was like, I always want to believe in truth.

I was like, I always want to search out truth and I believe in justice and those are like the two big things for me. But because of that sort of fundamental tenet of who I was, it sort of led me out of Christianity, Christianity, because I still value truth. Like, and want to make sure that like the nuance of a situation or the truth and facts and evidence are always made sure to be properly addressed, if that makes sense.

So, yeah, it was way more internal than it was external, if that makes sense. That makes sense. Okay, so can you speak to some of the weakest points of theistic belief, whatever said religion? But I mean, you grew up in a Christian.

Just walk us through some of the weakest, the things that fell first that made the structure unable to hold itself up in your life. What were some of the things that you were just, was it things concerning the Bible? Was it concerning just the rational belief in just God as an abstract concept and not the physical words of the Bible? Jesus's life was not plotted, those kinds of things. What were some of the building blocks that were taken out? Yeah, yeah.

The main, I think the main driver for me was just like me looking at it and being like, this doesn't make a lot of sense. Okay. That was the thing I was struggling with.

And I was like, a lot of it, the pieces just aren't fitting for me. I was just like, okay. And the more and more and more I learned, I was like, okay, this, I can't, I can't.

The old arguments that I would have used to refute the things I was finding just didn't stand up. And that was the big thing is again and again and again, when it came to science, when it came to sort of an atheistic worldview, I was running into arguments that were backed up by evidence and facts that people could point to and be like, look at these things that we have found. And then when Christians, and I'm going to mainly rely on Christianity because that's what I grew up as, but yeah.

When it came to those things, it was like, how do you feel about this? Or like, what do you think about this? It was never, I never really, whenever it comes to Christian argument for theism, it never really relied on facts. It was always like, well, what do you think of this? And it was always like a straw man argument of, or something of that nature for me. And I was just like, this is kind of weird.

Yeah. And then I started looking at Christianity itself and I was like, okay, how does this make sense? And I was trying to make the pieces fit and they just weren't making any sense. Trying to think of an example.

Oh, the big one, one big one for me was like, why would God come at a time where people couldn't read? There wasn't any way to prove anything and let, like there wasn't any video evidence photography because in the mindset of a Christian, it's like, well, he knows that we would have developed videography, cinematography, and our science

would have become far more complex and sophisticated. He would have known that, but he decided to go to a place where literacy was like at an all time low. He could have even gone to China, you know? Yeah.

He could have even like, where reading, or he could have even gone to the height of Rome. But he didn't. And that was the big question for me when I was like, this doesn't make any sense.

Like if he really loves people, if he really wanted once everyone to be a follower and have a relationship with him, then why didn't he show up where he not only could have been proven that he exists so that everyone would have no doubt and then could really make a good choice? I was like, that was the first big question when I was just like, I can't explain this in a way that makes ethical, moral sense. I was like, I can't even make it make sense logically. It just doesn't make, it didn't make, I couldn't make that piece of it.

And then other things started coming in where I was like learning more and more about human history and evolution and things like that. And I was like, I found out there have been eight different species of human that have lived and Neanderthals lived alongside humans for a couple thousand years. And I was like, this is, I don't understand it.

I can't wrestle with it. And then this was after I became an atheist, but I saw this, someone wrote this to me and they were like, well, imagine this, okay. There's one selected group, one religion is supposed to be one God, one religion, one selected group of people that are true and right on one planet out of 2000 plus gods and deities and religions.

And then on that planet out of one trillion billion planets out of multiple galaxies, there's only one planet. And out of the 2000 plus, it was just like I was like, this doesn't make any sense. And then there was the moral questions that I was also getting into.

It's like, why doesn't God, if he loves people so much, why doesn't he help those people who are in trouble? You know, which the big thing for me was because I answered that question when I was like 13, I was like, oh, the reason he doesn't do it is because he would impede free will. And if a person wants to do something evil, then he's not going to stop them from doing something evil. But then I came to this point where I was like, there are multiple instances where that just doesn't hold up, where it's no one's will being put upon someone else, like a starving child.

Natural evil, famines, earthquakes. Like, yeah, it's like, yeah, but even that could have been explained by, well, you know, people are polluting the earth, people are causing increased global warming. You know, even that can be like this domino effect type of thing.

But I was like, what's to stop God from dropping mana on a starving child or welling a spring in front of that starving kid, you know, who's malnourished and is going to die in a day? Yeah. Because he did it in the Bible for his chosen people, but he doesn't do it for these dying and sick kids. There's a quote by Adam, David Attabura, where he is like talking about there's a pair, there are parasites that are specifically for human.

There's a worm that burrows in human eyes, and the entire purpose of that worm is to burrow in human eyes. They don't burrow in anyone else's eye because they're a human parasite. That's their entire livelihood.

Like, that's how they live. That's their purpose. Yeah.

And it's like, well, if God created all things on this planet, he created that worm too. I was like, came to this point where I was like, if God exists, he's not a God I'd want to worship in the first place. Yeah, those are all really helpful.

That gives us, I think, a good idea of some of the big things, the shaky points. Yeah. Yeah.

We got to wrap this up because I got to head out in a second, unfortunately. Right. Really appreciate you walking through that.

And we're going to do a follow up more dialogue. This is for the listeners. This was more of a get to know Keegan.

Let's see where Keegan's at and what his views are and how he got there. And then maybe, man, you can talk about a few of those big points and things we were talking about, and we can dive into them a little more. Yeah.

But-- Definitely. I think it would be really interesting to get into those types of-- Yeah. Yeah.

Sure. And if you're willing, and we can find the availability. Last thing, just to wrap up, how do you view religion right now? Completely useless of some use.

Do you hate religion? Or when you see people that are religious doing things that you would deem are not what we should be doing? That kind of thing. What's your view of that right now? And then we can wrap things up. Last question.

Yeah. As far as religion as a whole is concerned, it's a mixed bag for me because I think that it causes some truly horrific things to happen in the world. Truly terrible things have been done in the name of religion.

And many of those religions are written in that way for people to do those terrible things because they're ancient religions. But at the end of the day, I also think there's some good to it. I think that many things in religion are wisdom that have been created and

given to us by our ancestors, by our people, by other humans.

And at the end of the day, I don't hate religion. I definitely hate some of the things that it does. But I also love some of the things that it does.

So I think that it deserves respect until it stops deserving its respect. That's sort of where I've come to. OK.

So yeah, that makes sense. That makes sense. But yeah, thanks for talking with me.

I really enjoyed it. I mean, likewise. I'll definitely-- it's nice catching up.

Yeah, I know. It was good to talk before this too and just catch up. Well, thanks for the King listeners for tuning in and listening to my friend Keegan share with us some of his ideas and things that have happened over the past few years in his life.

So we really appreciate you, Keegan, sharing that with us. And we'll do a follow up episode. Keegan and I will find a time to talk again and actually have more dialogue on the subject.

But remember to like and subscribe and share the podcast if you find it valuable and worth listening to. And we have a website up now at fortheKingpodcast.com. And then if you have any inquiries or want to interact with any of the things that were spoken today on this episode, you can reach me at fortheKingpodcast@gmail.com and send me an inquiry or a question or anything like that. And yeah, I think that's it.

So as always, we do it for the King, to the King, through the King, by the King. It's for the King Jesus. Thanks for listening, guys.

Ready? Yeah. Yeah, I got to. It was nice talking to you, though.

It was good to catch up and everything. Who's that? My brother. Bryce.

Oh, how's it going, man? We met before, like once or twice. Yeah, that one pub. Oh, yes.

When we had your Russian nesting dogs or whatever those things were. I don't know if they were nesting dogs. You remember that? Yeah, yeah.

Watch your stuff. That's funny. That's funny.

All right. Well, it was nice talking to you. Yeah, good to talk to you too, man.

Love you, brother.

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(upbeat music)

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