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Why Wasn't God's Rescue Plan More Immediate and Peaceful?

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#STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about why God's rescue plan wasn't more immediate and peaceful and whether God wants us to be gullible and doesn't provide hard evidence as proof of his claims that he's different from all the other false religions and charlatans out there.

* Why wasn't God's rescue plan more immediate and peaceful?

* Does God want us to be gullible? If he knows how many false religions, charlatans, and liars there are, why can't he give us hard evidence as proof of his claims so he'll stand out from the others?

Transcript

[Music] Welcome to Stand to Reason's #STRask podcast. I'm Amy Hall and with me is Greg Koukl. Hello Amy.

Hello Greg. Alright, this first question comes from S. Alright. Alright.

Why Wasn't God's Rescue Plan More Immediate and Peaceful? A friend thinks all the blame, all the blameless animal death, brutal violence and taking thousands of years of suffering don't make for a good rescue plan if God knows best. I don't know how to approach this complaint. Well, hmm, I guess two things come to mind here and this we've discussed with regards to other theological issues.

I don't know if we've done that so much on the year or just privately Amy, you and I. But sometimes the most important thing to do is to figure out what's true. Based on the best evidence and then if the evidence is good for the truth you hold to the truth and then you try to answer the objections or the challenges or the issues that come up in light of what is already well justified. And the reason I say this is a lot of times people raise issues like this and I don't know why S is raising this if this is S's individual concern or somebody else.

Somebody else challenged says a friend thinks all thinks this so someone has challenged him with this. So if for example we start with well this doesn't make sense to me and then here's the objection. What about this or what about the other thing or what about the other the other and so these become the barriers for them counting and seeing the possibility of Christianity being true.

Then I think the tale is wagging the dog because there are a lot of what abouts that we can't answer because they have to do with the mind of God which God hasn't revealed to us in many cases. This is my standard response to most questions that start out why did God or why didn't God and the answer is we don't know because God didn't tell us many cases. And this is that kind of question.

The question that should perceive that is is there a God. Do we have good reasons that there is a God over the world and if Jesus is somehow related to that or the Bible somehow related to that and that biblical plan and description of how the world operates and what God has done for mankind. Do I have good reasons to believe that that's true.

I think the answer to those questions are all yes there is a God and Jesus does relate to that plan and there are good reasons to believe that the world view that is characterized in the scripture the nature of the world and also the nature of humanity and human problems and the solution for it. Which is the mercy and forgiveness that God provides through his son who suffered on our behalf and rose from the dead. All kind of classic religious lines but these are all substantiated with good reasons if all of that we have good reason to think that's true.

Then we can speculate on some of these other issues but they aren't decisive issues. Well you can't answer that question so I'm not going to believe in all of this other stuff. Well if all of this other stuff that I just described in some is well justified then we ought to believe in it for those reasons and then be willing to live with some of the mystery or confusion or unanswered questions that inevitably go along with every single world view.

Okay Christianity is not tidy and the reason Christianity is not tidy there's all these loose ends is because life is not tidy and therefore no world view is completely tidy. There's all kinds of loose ends and some have more than others like atheism is thick with loose ends because almost nothing about atheism comports with our deepest intuitions about the nature of the world. Okay but Christianity turns out to do that.

That's why I've said to my daughter when she was eight years old the reason we believe God is true in response to her question is because he's the best explanation for the way things are. So we looked at the nature of reality and we're looking for a worldview that best explains all aspects of that. That's why I'm a Christian because I think it does that not because there aren't unanswered questions there are.

There are all kinds of things I wish I even wish were different but I can't wish things into

existence. I have to try to explain the world as it actually is. Now once that's done one might speculate why did God do it the way he did.

Okay let's just talk about suffering okay because I get pressed on this once before about all the suffering of all the animals and all this other stuff. I asked the question this was a Christian to raise the issue is whether pain was a design feature or not. Well it's a complex neurological response obviously has to be designed.

This person like I said was a Christian well then God made it for a purpose. There's a reason for pain and of course we understand this pain if we are going to live in physical bodies in a physical world and enjoy all the benefits of a physical universe that are available for us to enjoy there are also dangers. And the pain response alerts us to the danger that is present for us if we don't attend to the pain.

So at least in a limited way we could see well there is a sensibility to why there is pain in the world. Now it seems to me there's an excess amount of it in virtue of the fall and it's interesting in the Genesis 3 God says that Eve's pain in childbirth would be increased. In other words there was already pain in childbirth it was the nature of the thing was discomfort but now it's going to be more because of the fall.

So we have an aggravated set of circumstances because of the fall but I don't think pain is a bad thing. I think pain is a good thing the way God designed it. Now someone can say well why did God have to make the world where pain would be a good thing.

I don't know. I can't answer that. But because I can't answer that doesn't mean that I don't have good reason to believe that God made the world and that the testimony in Scripture to the nature of the world isn't accurate and that when Jesus came to reveal the Father and he did so and he gave signs and wonders giving evidence to the truth of his claims including dying and rising from the dead.

Given all that stuff I have no reason to think that the Christian worldview is false. And so I don't doubt the worldview because there are aspects that seem to follow from it about God's intentions that I don't understand. In my view that's the tail wagging the dog.

That is the objection dismissing all the other evidences. The unanswered question I should say it's not even an objection. It's an unanswered question.

So anyway that's my instinct about this question and questions like it. They're moving in the wrong direction. And even if I were to suggest well here's some of the reasons they're very easy for people coming from that perspective to be dismissive of if they haven't taken into consideration all the other things.

If we start at the right starting place and we come to the conclusion that this seems to be the way the world actually is and what best explains the world. Now there's these other questions. Well then it seems like possible solutions or answers to that question

become much more compelling if we have the thing itself in place and well justified.

If we don't have that justified then people can just shrug off any kind of reasonable explanation that we might offer because they're not taken into consideration the bulk of the evidence for the worldview to begin with. That's a great foundation Greg and it applies to so many different things. First you find out what is true and then you work on the things that you don't understand or don't quite don't quite make sense to you or you don't like.

You try to figure out how it works together or how you can make sense of it but first find out what is there. That's the first thing to do. So I think that's a great foundation.

Now in answering this question like you said there's no, I don't know that there's no direct or definitive. Yeah well there's no direct thing in the Bible where God says the reason why I am not coming back or you know so what you have to do and I just have a couple ideas about this. The first one is you have to find out what God's goal is before you can know whether or not he's getting to that goal.

That's great. So what is God's goal? God's goal is not merely to get us to heaven. God's goal is not merely to save people from their sin.

God's goal is to reconcile us to himself so that we will know him and enjoy him forever. He wants us to know him fully. Ephesians I think it's two talks about how he's doing all of this to the praise of the glory of his grace.

He's going to show the glory of the riches of his kindness and Jesus forever. Romans 9 talks about how those who hate God, how does he put it? Anyway he allows these sinners because he wants to make known the glory of the riches of his grace to his people. So he wants us to know him.

You'll see this throughout the whole Bible. I'm doing this so that they will know me so that they will know me over and over and over. So if God's goal is for us to know him there are certain things about a long history that reveals that.

When we see the way God worked in history we see his plan of bringing Abraham and creating a nation and bringing about the Messiah. We see his grace over and over and over throughout the history of the Israelites before we even get to the New Testament. We see his justice and his righteousness as he judges evil.

So as we see these nations that God brings down because of certain sins we see that he cares about justice. We were just talking about this in a previous episode. God cares about justice.

So if there were no history for us to look at there are a whole bunch of things we would never see. So we've never seen Jesus loving his enemies and dying for his enemies. You

know, for a good man.

You look so intently at me when you said that. No, because that would apply. Because I love it where it says, you know, someone might die for a good man.

But nobody's going to die for a bad man or his enemies. But that's what Jesus did. So that's a kind of love and grace that we wouldn't have seen without this history to look at.

We wouldn't have seen his patience. We wouldn't have seen, again, his justice, his judgment, his righteousness, his hatred of evil. We wouldn't have seen forgiveness.

There are a lot of aspects of God that, you know, God could say, I am gracious. Okay, well, that's one thing that hears a statement like that. But when you see the story of someone like John Newton and you see grace there in his life, that's a completely different way of looking at this.

And I think I've said this before in the show. It's like the difference between somebody writing the tree was in the field and then having a painting right next to it of this beautiful tree in the field. And you see all these details and you see art and you see beauty.

It's a different depth of the tree was in the field. Yeah, or being in the field with the tree. Yeah, that's another level.

Or to the point though, because we live in this world where these things are manifest, right? So all of these things, I think God does these things over time, over long stretches of time with lots of people in lots of different ways so that we will know him better. Now, you might as well ask, as he asked, you know, why not be more immediate and peaceful? Okay, well, why didn't Joyce Dostoevsky get that name out? Why didn't Joyce Dostoevsky write crime and punishment in 10 pages and just say the end of the story? Well, I think we all know why because there is an art and a beauty to the entire story and all of that story plays a part in revealing reality and truth and goodness and beauty to us. So I think all of those things are going on and suffering plays a part in that.

And a lot of people think that God exists to make us comfortable and that has never been the case. Just read through the Bible and you can see that isn't the case. But those are all things that I think about when I'm asked this question.

Yeah, excellent. All right, the next question comes from Sean. Does God want us to be gullible? See Proverbs 3, 5, and 6, among other quotes.

Why does God... 3, 5, and 6, really? Okay. I know this verse. I'm kind of curious.

Lean on on your own understanding. Yes. Oh, that's okay.

So, I'm just going to guess before I go on to the rest of the question. But the idea is we

submit ourselves to what God says and not lean on our own understanding. You can read that verse in a second.

Okay, so he goes on. Why does God and the churches that represent God act the same as cults? If God knows how many false religions, charlatans, and liars there are, why can he give us hard evidence of proof of his claims to separate himself from the others? This is a confused question to me. If we were having a conversation, I'd have a lot of follow-up clarification questions like, when you say, "Why are the church the same as cults?" Exactly what does that person have in mind? I was listening to a broadcast this morning, and as I was coming in, and it was a reference to cultic behavior, cultural cultic behavior, they said one of the very first things they do is they try to separate the person involved in the group from their natural family.

They try to cut them out from parental authority, okay? And this is an observation of cultic behavior that was made to other aspects of the cultural elements, okay? But this is an interesting observation because I think it's true that you get isolated out from family authority, for example. Okay, well, that's not Christianity, it's just the opposite. Where familial authority is built up and strengthened, and family is consistent with the nature of reality, mom, dad, kids, under their authority, growing up, or a period of time, marriages intact.

Okay, well, that's the opposite of cultic behavior. No willingness to engage other ideas, isolation from ideas. Well, there may be churches that do that, no question, but that isn't Christianity.

Here's Paul when he's speaking in the book of Acts, what, chapter 18 or so? He's on the areopagus, Mars Hill, and he's quoting Epicurean philosophers to these Greeks to make his point. He's not isolated from ideas, and in fact, knowledge of the ideas in the early church, like Gnosticism, etc., was what protected the Christians from error. They had to be clarified.

Here are the things that are being taught that are false, and here are the things that are correct. And individual people were taken exception with, I mean authors, etc., Valentinius, etc., etc., these Gnostics, I'm just using that as an example. So I'm not exactly sure what Sean is referring to when he's saying this is cultic behavior.

Now, if he means, well, Christians think that their view is the correct one and everybody else is wrong, that's what everybody believes. Sean thinks his own views are correct, and everybody who thinks like him is correct, and whatever it is that his beliefs touch. Everybody believes that.

All right, so why is it only Christians in this particular case are faulted for being cult-like because we have a body of ideas that we hold to be correct? Incidentally, we are not holding to those ideas slavishly. They are open for public review, and they are assessed

and challenged publicly, and we defend them publicly. So it isn't this private little enclave that we're involved with.

So these are just, I know you're ready to jump in here. Oh, no, I was just going to bring up to the, because we're coming to the end of the show here, so I just wanted to make sure. What I think he's saying, I think his main point here is that there are all these false religions and charlatans and liars, as he says.

So why doesn't God make it clear by giving us hard evidence and proof of his claims so that Christianity would stand out and not look the same as all these other things? Okay, so that's the other other thing I didn't get to yet because I've been blathering on here about this other point. But there's nobody involved in our project that would say that Christianity looks like all the other religions. It looks nothing like the other religions.

All the other religions are man centered, what men do, human beings do to save themselves. Christianity is a rescue plan where God rescues man, man doesn't rescue himself. This is the story of reality.

Why? Because man can't rescue himself. That sets Christianity apart from every other religion. Okay, and then there are more dimensions of that that I could get into, the distinctiveness of Christianity and also Christianity uniquely has the area called apologetics, where there are volumes and volumes and volumes that have been written down through history in defense of classical Christianity, explaining why Christianity is true and other religions are false.

Now, that might not be persuaded to some people. I grant that. But you can't say that there's none of that going on in Christianity.

It's just about the only religion that makes any attempt to give a rationale and evidence to justify its views. So in both of those areas, Christianity stands entirely apart, maybe not above other religions, but certainly apart from them. And I mean, I think above, but I'm just trying to be neutral here, certainly apart from them as very distinctive in their views and the way they justify their views.

Well, part of the reason why is because with Judaism and Christianity, these religions are uniquely entwined in history. So because they are connected to historical events, very closely, the main events, the exodus, the resurrection, I mean, the entire story. Right, the pinnacle of that's right.

The Old Testament and the New Right. So there's something people can test. In many other religions and cults and things like that, you have one person who has ideas about how they view reality and they share those ideas and they teach those ideas and people live by them.

But there's really no way to test them because they're not connected to historical claims

about reality. So that's why I think that's a huge difference between the two. Because if somebody just has some sort of a vision, I have no way to test that.

I mean, unless they're saying things that are obviously false and every reason is to think they're false. So when Sean says, well, why didn't these things happen? Why aren't these the case? Why didn't God do this? My answer is, but they are the case. These things did happen and God did do these things.

And I don't know, especially in, I'm not faulting Sean here, but Sean must know something about what we do to send a message in the way he's done. Maybe he's going to listen to this a lot. But all that we do is to clarify the very distinctives that he's asking for, differences from other religions, evidence that Christianity is true, etc.

And I just want to throw one more quick thing out there, Greg. There's a book called *The Bible Among the Myth*. And I think that... Oh, yeah.

Ron Nash? No, I think that author is John Oswald. It's a short book, but what's so amazing about it is that he looks at the other worldviews of the ancient religions and how radically different the Jewish worldview was when it just appeared out of nowhere. And he makes the case for how this points to a divine origin.

So that's part of it, but the other part would be you can see if you actually look at these other religions how radically different the worldview is. And so sometimes we assume everybody thinks the way we do. We've all been trained by the Christian worldview in the West.

And so we think certain ways. And we don't realize that it is radically different from the other previous worldviews that existed. So I recommend, if you're listening, Sean, that you look into that book and see what the differences are at the most foundational level of religion.

And it's not too long and it's not a difficult read. It's like when people say, "Well, religions are about God, or religions are all about love, or religions are all about morality." Well, those three statements are false. They're just false.

It's not the case. But I think Buddhism, for example, is a non-theistic religion. God doesn't enter it into it at all.

Animism has no element of God, nor morality. It's all about controlling spirits. So, and so is a lot of the ancient pantheons.

How do we control these gods that are doing their capricious evil things? And how do we get along with them kind of thing? So this is just very testimony. What you're saying, we have this reflex action because we have grown up in a certain environment that we think, well, this is the way all religion is because of the influence of the Judeo-Christian

worldview upon our thinking. But it isn't.

This is very radical with regards to most religions. So hopefully that gives you a few things to think about, Sean, and some places to look for more information. All right, Greg, that's the end of the show.

Okay. Thank you all for listening. We look forward to hearing from you on Twitter with the hashtag #STRAsk.

This is Amy Hall and Greg Cokal for Stand to Reason.

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