Do You Believe Your Eyes?

1. John 9 is a study in theology, psychology and sociology. That makes it one of the most fascinating chapters in a fascinating book.

2. It starts with a fascinating question: John 9:1-2. In Jesus's day, the religious leaders taught that Exodus 34:7 (the the 3rd and 4th) explained suffering and that, failing that, it was possible for someone to sin as a fetus or in a preexistent state.

3. Jesus dismisses this and says, instead, that this is an opportunity to show the work of God. Notice – his apostles treated this person as a theological problem rather than a person. Instead of "why does God allow people to be hungry?" Jesus would say "Why aren't you feeding them?" No karma, no cosmic balance – just a call for personal action.

4. Jesus doesn't wait. The night comes when no man can work…and Jesus knows his time is limited. He teaches the apostles that seeing someone in distress or with needs is a sign, not of sin to be sought and sourced, but of an opportunity to show grace and care.

5. Jesus uses spit and ceremony and tells him to bathe in the pool of Siloam…but never expressly says why or that healing was a possibility (though the man might have overheard). When the man goes and washes off the mud, he causes a sensation. John 9:8-12.

6. Some saw and recognized him. Others discounted the possibility (thus ending the argument atheists make that people in that time believed miracles were everywhere – they were skeptical, too). They wanted to find the man who healed the blind man but…he wasn't near where Jesus and he met earlier and had never seen him…of course.

7. This is distressing to the community so they brought him to the Pharisees. Surely, those who spoke for God and who interpreted law and signs would know what was going on here. John 9:13-16.

8. I can remember all my early life was filled with these questions. I saw people like Mother Teresa who loved God and served the poor but we were told she had zero chance of salvation because she was a

Catholic. We saw people do amazing things for God and we dismissed it because they used instruments or they let a woman talk or… We insisted that God had a very distinct, well defined set of rules and that we had to stay within those guardrails to have any chance of escaping an eternity in hell. Because religious people told us so.

9. Note that the apostles dismissed the person and saw a problem. The Pharisees see a problem and dismiss the person. The theology, the system, must be protected at all costs!

10. The Pharisees are bound and determined to find a way to dismiss this event and protect their position. John 9:17-23. The parents are frightened. If they are put out of the synagogue, their community is gone. Most likely, they would lose their livelihood and earthly family, too.

11. This farce continues – as if a person could be pretending he was blind all of his life and as if his parents were complicit in the fraud!

12. John 9:24-34. Yes…when pressed, they went back to their theology that blamed him for his own blindness. Before we jump all over the Pharisees here and heap scorn on him, let us remember that massive wars have been fought over different forms of Christian faith, that families are still split by different ideas about God and faith, and that many churches survive by stressing their correctness and criticizing or condemning all others.

13. Jesus hears about this and responds. John 9:35-41. The Pharisees still stand against him. We will cut away from this scene before Jesus speaks at length about who he is and what that means for the Pharisees and all others. Instead, we will let the Pharisees' question and Jesus's response hang in the air.

14. I get emails demanding that I pull back, that I acquiesce, that I accept the wisdom of those who believe this or that…and when I ask where they got that, etc. it gets very muddy and always, always gets back to "there are consequences! Are we blind?"

15. We are entering the Easter season. It is about time we began asking each other if we will believe our eyes? Will we accept the eyewitness testimony of reliable people who didn't back off their story even when they were being tortured and killed?

16. When Jesus heals us and forgives us, will we believe? And will we believe, like Jesus, that God is a God of love who loves US and who isn't interested in church fights or distinctions between churches…but in people and in the moment?