

John 11:17-27 “Seeing the Glory of Christ through His Claim”<sup>\*\*1</sup>

Main Idea: In John 11:17-27, we see the glory of Christ through His amazing claim. By examining that claim we will earn three important things about Jesus.

The Backdrop to Jesus’ Claim (17-24):

1. Lazarus had died.
2. Martha approached Jesus.

I. His claim reveals who He is (25a).

- A. He is eternal.
- B. He is the resurrection and the life.
  1. He possesses resurrection life.
  2. He is resurrection life.
  3. He gives resurrection life.

II. His claim reveals what He can do (25b-26a).

- A. He enables the dead to live again.
- B. He enables those who believe in Him to never die.

III. His claim reveals what we must do with Him (26b-27).

- A. We must believe His word.
- B. We must believe He is the Christ.

Testing the Claim: Five evidences that prove Jesus’ claim is true...

1. He raised Lazarus from the dead (John 11:43-44).
2. He raised others from the dead (Mark 5:41-42; Matt. 11:5; 27:52-53).
3. He Himself was raised from the dead (John 20:1-9).
4. He is raising sinners from the dead (John 20:30-31).
5. He will raise those who believe in Him from the dead (John 6:39-40).

Congratulations to the Wheelersburg Pirates baseball team! This past weekend they participated in their fourth consecutive state tournament.

As I was driving home from Thursday’s semi-final victory I found myself thinking about my own brief baseball “career” many years ago, and another tournament came to mind. I was around 15 and our team was in the county tourney. We won a series of games and found ourselves the winner’s bracket champion, with only one team to beat, the loser’s bracket champion. And since it was a double elimination tournament, they had to beat us twice.

I came in as a relief pitcher, tried to pick a runner off at second, and the ball went into centerfield. The throw went home, but our team lost the game on a questionable call at the plate.

Again, since it was a double elimination tourney, we had to replay the team that just beat us, and for some reason, the coaches decided to go ahead and play that second game that very night.

I remember pleading with our coach, “Let me pitch again in the final game. I know I can do it. We’ll get them this time.”

And so the coach put me on the mound to start the final game. “Can you do it?” he had asked. “I can do it,” I assured the coach with a confident claim.

I don’t remember getting out of the first inning. I think the final pitch I threw ended up going over the left field fence. And my next action with the ball was handing to the coach who put it in the reliever’s hand.

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<sup>\*\*</sup>Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

<sup>1</sup> For an earlier development of this text, see the sermon preached at WBC on 4/4/10, “I Am the Resurrection.”

As I recall, that was the last baseball game I ever played in.

It's easy to make a claim. It's easy to make a claim with great enthusiasm and self-assurance. But it takes more than self-assurance to make a claim a valid claim. If you're going to make a claim, you'd better have what it takes to back it up, or the claim, quite frankly, isn't worth listening to.

That's what I found myself thinking on Thursday as I drove home from Columbus. Jesus made a lot of claims, and there's a huge difference between His claims and the one I made to my coach that night so long ago.

Let's look in our Bibles now at the claim that Jesus made in John 11:17-27. At the beginning of John's Gospel, the writer said, "We have seen His glory (1:14)," and throughout this Gospel record, Christ put His glory on display on page after page.

Last time we saw Him put His glory on display in His response to sickness (in verses 1-6), in response to danger (in verses 7-10), and in response to death (in verses 11-16). This morning, in verses 17-27, we're going to see Christ put His glory on display through an amazing claim, and by examining that claim we're going to learn three important things about Jesus.

Of course, Jesus made many claims during His ministry on earth. He even made claims regarding His claims! He said in John 8:24, "If you do not believe that **I am the one I claim to be**, you will indeed die in your sins." I'd say that's pretty good incentive for finding out who He claimed to be, wouldn't you agree?

By the time we come to John 11, Jesus has already made a series of compelling claims, such as...

John 6:51 "**I am the living bread** that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever..." (see also John 6:35 & 48)

John 8:12 "**I am the light of the world**. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." (see also 9:5)

John 10:9 "**I am the gate**; whoever enters through me will be saved." (also in 10:7)

John 10:11 "**I am the good shepherd**. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." (also in 10:14)

Later in John we hear Jesus say...

John 14:6 "**I am the way and the truth and the life**. No one comes to the Father except through me.

John 15:5 "**I am the vine**; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." (also in 15:1)

So Jesus made a lot of claims, but none more stunning than the one before us. In many of the other claims, Jesus used images and metaphors. *I am living bread, the light, the gate, the good shepherd, the vine*. But in John 11, there is no figurative language. Just a bold, glory-revealing claim.

In John 11:25-26 Jesus said, "I am the resurrection." He didn't say, "I will be raised from the dead," although He did make that claim elsewhere (Mark 10:34). This claim is not about what He would do, but who He was. *I am the resurrection*.

*And the life*. Again, not simply, "I give life, but *I am life*."

And there's more. "*He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.*"

Again, quite a claim. But why did Jesus say that in the first place? There's a context, a backdrop, and we consider it to appreciate it.

### The Backdrop to Jesus' Claim (17-24):

The text says that Jesus said this *to her*. That's Martha. And He said it Martha because something had happened to her brother four days earlier. Namely...

**1. Lazarus had died.** We're told in verse 1 that Lazarus became sick. Martha and her sister, Mary, had actually called for Jesus while their brother was still living. "Lord, the one you love is sick," was their message in verse 3.

But Jesus, who was miles away in the Trans-Jordan (10:40), delayed His coming, announcing in verse 4, "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it." Jesus actually waited until Lazarus died before He made the journey to Bethany.

I should point out that some suggest that's not the case. Some say that Lazarus was already dead by the time the messenger arrived. They assert this because of a couple of time indicators in the text.

One, the statement in verse 17, "On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days." Carson says that from Jewish sources it's well known that a day's journey for a healthy person was about 25 miles. So do some figuring.

It took the messenger one day to get from Bethany to Jesus in the Trans-Jordan, a distance of 25 miles or so. Jesus then delayed going to Lazarus for 2 days, according to verse 6. Then Jesus traveled to Bethany, which apparently took a day.

If Lazarus was in the tomb for *four* days by the time Jesus arrived, that means that Lazarus died *before* the messenger told Jesus Lazarus was sick. So a traditional view says that Lazarus died very soon after the messenger left. So Jesus wasn't being unkind for not coming to heal Lazarus. It was too late anyway. The reason He delayed, it is said, was to show His refusal to be manipulated, as well to make sure no one could say He merely resuscitated Lazarus, no way, not after *four* days in the tomb.

I'm not convinced by this timeline. It seems to me that Jesus' words in verse 4 indicate that Lazarus was still alive when the messenger came ("This sickness *will* not end in death. It *is* for God's glory"). It was two days later that the Master said, "Lazarus is dead (14)."

So how do we get *four days in the tomb* from that point? The answer is, twofold. One, we don't exactly where Jesus was. He'd been on the other side of the Jordan River back in 10:40, but where exactly? Straight east is 25 miles, but perhaps further north. Carson suggests He may even have been in the region of Batanea, that's 100 miles northeast of Jerusalem. And it could easily take Jesus and His men four days to cover that distance.

The other factor is we don't know how fast this fairly large group was moving. Remember, Jesus has at least 12 men with Him, probably others, and every where He goes people are seeking His attention. How many times was He detained? We know that Martha had time to reach Him and return to Mary before He ever made it the final leg of the trip.

Here's another important piece of information that's the backdrop for Jesus' claim. The text says that...

**2. Martha approached Jesus.** Notice verses 18-20, "Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in

the loss of their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.”

So the sisters are grieving, but when they hear that Jesus is approaching (notice the news of His coming travels more quickly than He does), they responded, but differently. Mary stayed home. Why? We’re not told. But Martha set out to meet the Lord.

You might think from the Luke 10 account that Mary is the devoted one—she sat at Jesus’ feet while Martha was distracted with food preparation. And while Mary was devoted, so was Martha, and here *she*’s the one taking steps to be near Jesus. Devotion to Jesus shows up in different ways.

Martha was bewildered and told Jesus so in verse 21, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” She knew Jesus had the power to heal the sick. What she didn’t understand was why He didn’t in her brother’s case.

I’m amazed by her faith as evidenced by her words in verse 22, “But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.” The implication? God will give you my brother’s beating heart again, Jesus, if you’ll just ask Him.

Jesus replied in verse 23, “Your brother will rise again.” How did Jesus know that? How could He so confidently announce what was going to happen to Lazarus in the future? Because He knows the future, indeed, He holds the future.

Martha persisted in verse 24, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.” Do you see what Martha is doing? She’s trying to tell Jesus what He meant by what He just said. He said, “Your brother will rise again.” She assumes He’s talking about the final resurrection and replies, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.”

She knew that because she knew her Bible. She knew what David had said in Psalm 16:9-11: “Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.”

*I know that’s going to happen to Lazarus, said Martha. I know he’ll be raised in the final resurrection.*

At which point Jesus uttered this amazing claim in verses 25-26, a claim that reveals to us three things about Jesus. One, who He is; two, what He can do; and three, what we must do with Him.

### I. His claim reveals who He is (25a).

Verse 25—“Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life.’” As we ponder those words carefully, we learn a couple of things about who Jesus is.

**A. He is eternal.** “*I am the resurrection and the life,*” said Jesus. He is the “I AM.” Of course, those words just about got Jesus stoned two chapters earlier when He announced in John 8:58, “Before Abraham was born, I am!” Jesus the Christ, while being 100 percent human, is also 100 percent divine. He is self-existent and equal with God the Father. He is the Son of God. He is the eternal *I am*.

**B. He is the resurrection and the life.** Notice the order, first resurrection, then life. As Hendriksen explains, “Resurrection opens the gate to immortal life.”<sup>2</sup> I am the resurrection, says Jesus, and the life.

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<sup>2</sup> William Hendriksen, *The Gospel of John*, p. 150.

But what does He mean? What is He communicating by that claim? I see three truths wrapped up in those words.

1. *He possesses resurrection life.* Again, it's not something He *will* possess, but rather what He *is* in the present. He Himself is the resurrection and the life. John 1:4 declares, "In Him was life." That's how He could create the universe.

I don't have enough faith to believe in evolution. How could *something* come into existence out of *nothing*? The evolutionist cannot explain the origin of matter, let alone *life*, not to my satisfaction. How did non-living material come into existence, and then, how this material, once in existence, then become *living*?

The answer? They tell us it was the result of time and random chance. I'll be honest. I don't have enough faith to believe that. By God's grace, I choose to believe this, the revelation of God Himself. This revelation says that the One who Himself is life chose to create life. He didn't have to find it for He possesses it. What's more...

2. *He is resurrection life.* Jesus says, "I identify what resurrection and life is." It is Me. Jesus spelled out the implication of this when He said in John 14:6, "I am the way and the truth and the life [that's who I am]. No one comes to the Father except through me." In light of who I am, if you want to go to heaven and enjoy eternal life with the Father, you must come through Me.

3. *He gives resurrection life.* Martha, the One who has the power to raise your brother from the dead in the final day has the power to raise him from the dead right now, if He so chooses.

By the way, do Jesus' words allow for the belief in reincarnation? The answer is *no*. While studying the Greek word translated "resurrection," I found a helpful comment in *The Greek-English Lexicon*, "In a number of languages there is a difficulty involved in formulating some expression for 'resurrection' or 'living again,' since such a phrase may refer to what is technically known as metempsychosis, that is to say, the rebirth of the soul in another existence, a belief which is widely held in a number of areas of south Asia. This problem may be avoided in some languages by speaking of 'his body will live again' or 'his body will come back to life' or 'he will be the same person when he lives again.'"<sup>3</sup>

Let there be no misunderstanding. This is what Jesus gives, not the rebirth of a soul in another existence, but resurrection life. The term "resurrection" comes from the verb "to rise, to rise up, to rise again, to rise again after laying down, to stand up." Jesus isn't talking about Lazarus coming back as a different creature. He says that Lazarus will come back *as Lazarus*, and you'll know him, Martha.

So who is Jesus? Hear His claim. He is the eternal one, the I Am. He is the resurrection and the life, and as such He possesses resurrection life, He is resurrection life, and He gives resurrection life.

May I say this to you, my non-Christian friend? I am so glad you are here today, and here's why. You are learning right now about the One who is life itself. If Jesus' claim is true, then so is this. You need Jesus, because if you don't have Jesus, you don't have life. Real life, eternal life, is found only in the person who is life itself, and I pray you'll come to know Him today!

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<sup>3</sup>Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996, c1989). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament : Based on semantic domains* (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition.) (1:262). New York: United Bible societies.

But there's more to His claim. Listen to what else He told Martha in verses 25-26, "He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die." From His claim, first we learn who Jesus is. Second...

## II. His claim reveals what He can do (25b-26a).

He told Martha that He can do two things, and these put Him in a class all by Himself.

**A. He enables the dead to live again.** "He who believes in me will live, even though he dies." If your doctor said that to you, you would head for the door immediately. If he said, "Listen. You have a terminal disease. But if you'll just believe in me, you'll live even though you die." That's a ludicrous claim coming from the lips of a mere mortal.

But Jesus is no mere mortal. He is the virgin-born God-man. He left heaven and came to earth so that the dead could live again *through Him*. If you believe in Me, He said, you will live even though you die.

This isn't the only time Jesus said this. In John 5:21 He told a hostile group, "For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it." Jesus said He can give life to anyone He chooses. He has the power to enable the dead to live again. That claim infuriated the religious Jews, but He didn't back down.

"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him," He said in John 6:44, "and I will raise him up at the last day."<sup>4</sup>

What can Jesus do? He can enable the dead to live again, the physically dead, and the spiritually dead, too. But there's more. He told Martha He can do something else.

**B. He enables those who believe in Him to never die.** Hear His words again, "And whoever lives and believes in me will never die (26)." Let that sink in. *Will never die.*

How can that be? Jesus' followers die, don't they? Yes they do, and some in very terrible ways. Martyrdom. Cancer. Victims of crime. Indeed, they die, for it's appointed unto man to die once, says Hebrews 9:27. We're all going to die, unless the Lord returns first.

Jesus here seems to be talking about the *ultimate* death. The Bible calls it "the second death" in Revelation 20:14, which is "the lake of fire." Jesus' people have no fear of the lake of fire for the second death holds no power over them. And this isn't an isolated text. Jesus said in John 8:51, "I tell you the truth, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death."

I used to be afraid of dying. I remember laying on my bed at night as a child and wondering, "What's going to happen to me when I leave this world?" I couldn't shake the anxiety. And then my pastor shared with me the most amazing words, and I now share them with you, "God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life (1 John 5:11-12)."

For many, death is the great enemy, the foe they cannot avoid nor defeat. But for Jesus' followers, death is merely a door, a passageway from life with Jesus here to the fullness of never-ending life with Jesus there. As Leon Morris explains, "The moment a

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<sup>4</sup> 1 Cor. 15:21 "For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man."

man puts his trust in Jesus he begins to experience that life of the age to come which cannot be touched by death.”<sup>5</sup>

And that brings us to our third point. From the claim He spoke to Martha we learn, first, who Jesus is, then secondly, what Jesus can do. Thirdly...

### III. His claim reveals what we must do with Him (26b-27).

At the end of verse 26 Jesus asked Martha an important question, “Do you believe this?” That question is significant. It points out that Jesus isn’t being philosophical here with this resurrection talk. He’s giving comfort to a grieving sister. So this is truth for everyday life. But to benefit from it, the proper response is necessary.

And what is that response? What is it we must do with Jesus and His claim? It’s a one word answer.

“Do you *believe* this?” asked Jesus. *Believe*. Do you believe that I am the resurrection and the life? Do you believe that I can give life to someone who is dead, and that through me he or she will live forever? Do you believe what I am telling you, Martha? Do you believe my word?

We mustn’t miss that there’s a content to saving faith, for just believing something isn’t enough. Martha believed something specific, and so must we. What’s that?

**A. We must believe His word.** We must put our total trust in what He says. And specifically, what He says about Himself, namely...

**B. We must believe He is the Christ.** Like Martha did in verse 27, “‘Yes, Lord,’ she told him, ‘I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world.’”

My friend, if you want to experience eternal life, you must do what this grieving woman did by the grace of God. You must believe in the Savior’s word and believe that He indeed is the God-sent Christ.

I’m not talking about religion. I’m talking about putting your total trust in Jesus and His claim.

At this point you ought to be asking yourself a question, and it’s this. “How do I know His claim is true?” That’s a legitimate question because in reality, claims can be false. I made a false claim to my coach. Other than the subject matter, what makes Jesus claim any different, particularly different from those, like Mohammed, or Jim Jones, or others who claim to offer eternal life? The simple answer is, *evidence*.

Awhile back I read in *Voice of the Martyrs* the fascinating story of the 42 martyrs of Ammoria. I’d never heard the story before. In A.D. 838 Arab armies invaded Ammoria, located in modern day Turkey, and took control of the city. They killed or sold many of the Christians there. In addition, they captured 42 Christian commanders from the army of the Byzantine emperor, Theophilus, and took them as hostages to Samarra (in modern day Iraq). Then they threw them in prison where they remained for seven years.

The Muslim leaders told these prisoners, “Mohammed is the true prophet and not Christ.”

The commanders replied, “If there were two men debating about a field and the one said, ‘This field is mine’ and the other said, ‘It is not, it is mine,’ and nearby one of them had many witnesses saying it is his field and the other had no witnesses, but only himself, what would you say – whose field is it?”

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<sup>5</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, p. 550.

The Muslims answered, "Indeed, to him who had many witnesses."

"You have judged correctly," the commanders said. "That is the way with Christ and Mohammed. Christ has many witnesses: the Prophets of old, from Moses to John the Forerunner, whom you also recognize and who witness to and about Him [Christ], but Mohammed witnesses only to himself that he is a prophet and does not have even one witness."

For seven years the imprisoned Christians were coerced to embrace the Islamic faith, but they refused to deny Christ. And so in 845 they were beheaded and their bodies were thrown into the Euphrates River.<sup>6</sup>

When you're dealing with claims, evidence matters.

So it's time for a one question test. We've heard the claim. Now, is there evidence that Jesus' claim is true?

### Testing the Claim: Five evidences that prove Jesus' claim is true...

He claimed to be the resurrection and the life. Is there evidence? Yes, and here it is, five evidences. First, as we'll see when we get to the text in a couple of weeks...

1. *He raised Lazarus from the dead (John 11:43-44)*. It's one of my favorite passages in the Bible. I wish I had a DVD recording of the scene described in John 11:43-44, "Jesus called in a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out!' The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, 'Take off the grave clothes and let him go.'"

That's what I call evidence to support a claim! And the evidence was so convincing that many Jews put their trust in Jesus once they saw what He did for Lazarus (that's what verse 45 says).

In fact, in John 12 we're told that so many people were turning to Jesus because of Lazarus that the chief priests actually made plans to kill Lazarus (12:10). To borrow from the title of Josh McDowell's book, they were seeing *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, so they decided to get rid of the evidence.

But there's more evidence of His claim. It wasn't just Lazarus.

2. *He raised others from the dead (Mark 5:41-42; Matt. 11:5; 27:52-53)*. For instance, there was the daughter of a synagogue ruler named Jairus. We read what Jesus did for her in Mark 5:41-42, "He took her by the hand and said to her, '*Talitha koum!*' (which means, 'Little girl, I say to you, get up!'). Immediately the girl stood up and walked around (she was twelve years old). At this they were completely astonished."

And there were others. In Matthew 11:5 Jesus sent this message to John the Baptist who was in prison and apparently having second thoughts, "Report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, *the dead are raised.*" How many dead people did Jesus raise? I don't know but it's plural.

Here's another text. Matthew 27:52-53 tells us that the moment Jesus died, "The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs, and after Jesus' resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people."

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<sup>6</sup> *Voice of the Martyrs*, April 2010, p. 10.

There's evidence for you! Can you imagine the shock of seeing your loved ones knock on your door and say, "May I come in?"? But no evidence supports Jesus' claim like the next...

3. *He Himself was raised from the dead (John 20:1-9)*. Of course, Jesus predicted His resurrection on multiple occasions (as in Mark. 8:31; 9:9; 10:34). But few people seemed to expect it. I can't blame them. After all, they saw His bloodied body as it hung on the cross and then placed in the tomb. And it didn't make sense to them why He walked into the death trap in the first place. What would the Messiah choose to die?

We know the answer. We know that He died as a substitute for sinners because we know the rest of the story.

We've read the record of the evidence, haven't we? Like this record, penned by the apostle John himself, an eye witness (John 20:3-9): "So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. Then Simon Peter, who was behind him, arrived and went into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen. Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.)"

I love Peter's statement in Acts 2:24, "But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him." What was impossible? For death to hang on to Jesus. He is the resurrection, and resurrection and death can't coexist.

But the evidence isn't just ancient history, as important as that is. In reality, the One who raised Lazarus and others from the dead, and who Himself raised from the dead, is still demonstrating His resurrection power. That's right...

4. *He is raising sinners from the dead (John 20:30-31)*. I know He did with me! I was dead in my sins for the first eleven years of my life, but then the Risen Savior caused my dead heart to start beating again, and He gave me eternal life. How about you?

That's the point of this Gospel, according to John 20:30-31, "Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."

He's doing it even as I speak. Right now, all over this world Jesus is raising sinners from the dead. He is giving them His resurrection life. It becomes theirs the moment they believe in His powerful name.

Do you believe? The evidence is clear, my friend. He who claimed to be the resurrection and the life has verified His claim again and again. You can believe Him. You *must* believe Him for there's no one else who can do what He can do.

Which brings me to the last piece of evidence, one that's yet to come.

5. *He will raise those who believe in Him from the dead (John 6:39-40)*. Hear His words in John 6:39-40, "And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."

Do you believe this?