

Is There Life Beyond The Grave? (Part 1)
(Rev. Dr. John Bartol)

“There will be no major solution to the sufferings of mankind until we reach some understanding of who we are, what the purpose of creation was and what happens after death. Until these questions are unresolved, we are caught.”

Woody Allen

Death – the ultimate statistic

During the Middle Ages a human’s lifespan rose to 35 years. In 1910, female North Americans lived 55 years on average, and males 52. By 1945 that average had risen to 66 years. Today in Canada it’s 76.7 years for men and 82.5 years for women.

Most, if not all of us, share an inborn dread of death. We may avoid talking about it, but it is always there – waiting to claim parent, child, husband, wife, lover, friend and me!

Despite all our efforts to prolong life and perpetuate memory we know the inevitability of departure. One day the Bell will toll for each of us. As George Bernard Shaw expressed it, “Death is the ultimate statistic – one out of one dies”. Accident, cancer, bullet, bomb – death has many doors. But, what awaits us on the other side?

Cecil B.DeMille, the renowned movie director also professed the Christian faith. Shortly before his death, he wrote the following account: “One day as I was lying in my canoe, a big black beetle came out of the water and climbed into the canoe. I watched how under the heat of the sun the beetle proceeded to die. Then a strange thing happened. His glistening black shell cracked all the way down his back and out of that came a shapeless mass and iridescent wings spread wide as if in worship of the sun. Before my eyes had occurred a metamorphosis, a miracle – the transformation of a hideous beetle into a beautiful dragonfly which started dipping and soaring over the water. But the body it had left behind still clung to my canoe.”

“And the thought came to me,” continued Mr. DeMille, “that if the Creator works such wonders with the lowliest of creatures, what may not be in store for the human spirit?”

Death is the shedding of those parts which are no longer of value in the new life being entered. We are set free from the old, and, will be given a new body to glorify God.”

To be authentic and relevant, faith must equip us to face triumphantly the major passages of life and provide meaning and purpose in times of pain and loss. An honest examination of the evidence reveals that Christianity provides a very real source of hope and consolation in the face of death, both for the deceased and for grieving friends and family. As a friend of mine phrased it, “I expect to spend

most of my time in the future, so I want to be sure that my bags are packed and I am ready to go at any time.”

“Lord, help me to realize how brief my time on earth will be”(Psalm 39:4a LB).

(To be continued)