

LIFE AFTER DEATH

VERN BENNOM GRIMSLEY



...of shining beauty you have known, and every moment
you have spent in the luminous love of God and of people,
and those spiritual experiences, those ardent longings and
aspirations, those great hours of courage, endurance, waiting,
kindness, forgiveness, adventure, worship, joy and joy-
fulness are the many points of light scattered on your soul.
These glow as points of beauty throughout eternity. Each
thought and act of goodness, of love and faith, of wisdom
and of joy, is a gleaming point of light which will never, ever
fade. It is part of your heritage. It is yours forevermore. You by
your own will receive great truth and beauty that no one can
take away from you for all eternity and beyond.

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Transcripts of Spiritual Renaissance Broadcasts

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by

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One evening I saw something fascinating on a late night television talk show, with a guest panel consisting of a bearded guitar player, 2 nightclub singers, a Hollywood actor, and an author who had come to promote his latest book. Somehow, the conversation turned to the topic of death. From his repertoire of witticisms, the host of the talk show remarked that he wanted to die at 91 after having been shot by a jealous husband. But then he turned to his guests and asked how they wanted to die . . . , and what they thought about death. At this point the cameraman did a slow scan showing each person sitting on the couch, and the gallery of facial expressions which swept across the screen constituted one of the most fascinating 10 seconds I have ever seen in all of television. The guitar player began nervously biting his lip (I presume he was biting his lip; he appeared to have begun abruptly munching his beard). One of the nightclub singers wrinkled her nose. The Hollywood actor seemed to have become suddenly unaccountably fascinated with staring at his shoelaces while fidgeting with his cufflinks. The author momentarily lost all control of himself, and began literally writhing in his chair. This is true! And he began simultaneously coughing and clearing his throat uncomfortably. But it was the other nightclub singer who gave the most honest reaction. She contorted her face into a grimace, stuck her tongue straight out, and loudly declared, "Yecch!", which appeared to be an accurate summation of the attitudes of everybody else on the couch. Instantaneously the host of the program perceived that if he did not manage to get off the subject of death, the program itself was about to go into rigor mortis, so he quickly steered the discussion toward a current marriage scandal, and in a few moments, everybody was cheerfully discussing whether next year's hemlines would go up or down. They did not want to think about, much less talk about death!

Why do people fear that subject? What is death? What happens afterward? And what difference does your opinion of the subject make in the way you live your life?

William Derrick, the late Dean of the College of Physicians and Surgeons at Columbia University once said, "The

continued influence of those departed this life and the sense of reality of the continuing existence of their personality have been strong enough to remove for me any doubt as to some form of life after death. What it is or in what form I care not, but I believe that we continue to exist."

William James of Harvard once said that his interest in immortality was not of the keenest order but his belief grew stronger as he grew older. And when he was asked why he replied, "Because I am just now getting fit to live."

James Martineau, on his 80th birthday, said, "How small a part of my life-work have I been able to carry out. Nothing is as plain as this: That life at its fullest on earth is only a fragment."

Arthur H. Compton, the Nobel prize winning physicist, has written, "It takes a whole lifetime to build the character of a Nobel man. The adventures and disciplines of youth, the struggles and failures and successes, the pains and pleasures of maturity, the loneliness and tranquility of age. These make up the fire through which he must pass to bring out the pure gold of his soul. Having been thus perfected, what shall nature do with him? Annihilate him? What an infinite waste! I prefer to believe (wrote Compton) man lives on after death, continuing in a larger sphere, in cooperation with his Maker, the work he had here begun."

How then might one think of death? Some years ago in Elkhart, Indiana, an old school teacher named Professor S. B. McCracken passed away, and the inscription he composed for his tombstone reads as follows: "School is out. Teacher has gone home."

That's what dying is—going home. It is passing on to a realm of higher reality to begin a process of endless progression and growth, ascending through the universe, evolving in soul and in character becoming Godlike. The Master declared, "Be you therefore perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect." And it will require eternity to accomplish that.

No philosophy of life is complete without a philosophy of death. Professor John Finnegan, the archeologist, has collected a series of funeral inscriptions from the days of the Roman Empire which depict beliefs about the meanings of death prevalent before the times of Jesus. Here are some thoughts from those Roman tombstones: "I paid my debt to nature, and have departed." "I was, I am not, I do not care."

"What I have eaten and what I have drunk—that is all that belongs to me." "While I lived, I drank. Drink all ye who live." And finally, "Eat, drink, and play; and then come hither." Those were final inscriptions on tombstones of early Romans before the time of Christ.

But compare them to the epitaphs of those who called themselves "Christians", those who were the early followers of this charismatic carpenter, this Jesus of Nazareth, nearly 2000 years ago. For one man it was written: "May his sleep be in peace." Another: "Thou wilt live in God. Thou wilt live forever." Still another: "May God refresh thy spirit." Belief in immortality makes a profound difference in one's view of death!

Considering next the difference that belief in immortality makes in the living of life brings the vivid awareness that life on this perturbed planet is but the beginning. That man has a rendezvous with destiny beyond the sparkling stars of space . . . that a human being is not composed of flesh alone but that within each one of us there burns an imprisoned splendor, the living spirit of the living God. "The kingdom of God is within you," declared the Master, and to believe that is really to begin to live not only here on earth, but literally for all eternity.

One of the most famous pieces of music in history is the "Unfinished Symphony" by the Austrian composer, Franz Schubert. It was given that title because he died in 1828 before he could complete the manuscript. And yet it is my conviction that Schubert will finish his symphony, and will hear it played by an orchestra far better than any available here, for I believe in life beyond the grave. And the life of any good man or woman is an unfinished symphony of a sort—a masterpiece of music just begun. How could death end that?

Johann Sebastian Bach is dead, yet his music lives on. And if, as he said, his music poured forth from his soul, and if his music lives on, is it then so strange to think his soul lives on as well? How could dying touch that? Death may end heartbeat and breathing, but what of the personality? What of the character, creativity, wisdom, kindness of a man or a woman? Can a person's personality, will, character, love and honesty be sealed in the coffin with him and molder to dust in the grave? These things are not physical at all. How

could physical death end them? Is life a staircase to no place? I cannot think so! There is a high purpose to human existence.

What would you think if you went to a play at a theater, and at the end of the first act of a fascinating drama with an extremely intriguing storyline, the stage-manager stepped out between the curtains and said, "That's all, folks. Hope you enjoyed yourselves. Goodnight." and then the houselights went up. You would object. You would say, "This can't be the end of the drama, it was just beginning to get interesting!" So likewise, when death's curtain descends I cannot believe that the drama of life is ended. During one short lifetime on this earth existence is "just beginning to get interesting." There has to be more. And there is! Declared Jesus, "I go to prepare a place for you" . . . a place in the universal family of God in which you are a son or daughter, and infinitely loved; and knowing that will make both life and death a joy.

I personally possess an unwavering faith in eternal life. I can truthfully state that I feel as certain of life after death as I am certain of life before death. I am every bit as convinced that I shall live again as I am convinced that I am living now. But what survives death! Certainly not the physical body, not this temporary temple of flesh and bone, this physical cloak of clay in which our personalities are wrapped during this brief lifetime on earth. It is the soul which survives and the personality, the real you. What continues on is the living transcript of your mental and spiritual self, brought into being by the seeking of your mind to find and fathom the wisdom of the indwelling spirit of God, that divine spark which burns within your consciousness, which illumines your thinking, and leads you in truth, if you will choose to follow.

But what thoughts and memories will pass through the portals of death with you? Only that which is of meaning and of value. I envision the function of the soul as akin to that of a photographic plate. It only registers the light. When astronomers turn their telescopes to the vast and darkened regions of the midnight sky to photograph the feeble glimmerings of the distant stars and galaxies, the film records each silver speck of light against the boundless blackness of soundless space. So too, your living soul is sensitive to every glimmering of spiritual light, however faint and flickering it be, and it registers each gleam of goodness in your life, each

flash of fleeting beauty you have known, and every moment you have lived in the luminescent love of God and of people. And these spiritual experiences, these noblest longings and aspirations, these great hours of courage, compassion, service, friendship, fellowship, adventure, worship, love and joy—these are the starry points of light imprinted on your soul. These glow as galaxies of beauty throughout eternity. Each thought and act of goodness, of love and truth, of worship and of joy, is a glimmering of light which will never, ever fade. It is part of you forever. It is yours everlastingly. For by faith you will outlive your body and journey this universe in chariots of light for all eternity and beyond.

“O death, where is thy sting?
O grave, where is thy victory?”

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