



"Cross Connection"

Radio Ministry of Hope Wesleyan Church and Wells of Salvation Ministries
Ultimate Oldies Radio – FM 97.7 and 101.5, Huber Heights, Ohio



Series: Christian Messages In Secular Music

01/16/08

Program 17 – "I Shall Be Released" © 1967 Bob Dylan

Our ministry team has conducted hundreds of services in jails and state prison facilities. Although our visits are brief in comparison to the long days, months and years of incarceration that our audience members experience, many have come forward for prayer – giving us a glimpse of the personal anguish that these men and women experience. Many have also reached out for God in their confinement, and have joyfully found release from and forgiveness for sin that Jesus offers. Prison concerts and services have been among the most spiritual, sincere and inspiring worship services in which we have ever participated. More often than not, it's the prisoners that minister to us with their praise, prayers and Christ-centered worship.

To our knowledge, Bob Dylan has never been imprisoned; even so, he wrote "I Shall Be Released" – which has resonated not only with that in prison, but with those seeking release from any kind of physical, emotional or spiritual bondage. Background¹:

- Bob Dylan recorded two primary versions -- the first in 1967 and a second time in 1971 on *Bob Dylan's Greatest Hits Vol. II*
- One of the earliest versions was recorded by Joan Baez (1968). She frequently performed the song live, often dedicating it to political prisoners.
- The Band played it on their debut album, *Music from Big Pink* (1968)
 - Gave a legendary performance of the song near the end of their farewell concert, *The Last Waltz*
- Also recorded by Rick Nelson, Bette Midler, The Jerry Garcia Band, and Sting
- Performed twice at Woodstock – by Joe Cocker, and later by The Band

Listener interpretations of the song's lyrics vary. Here are some views we found²:

- "I see this as an anti-death penalty song....a man who is on death row and is innocent...knows he will be released in a figurative sense when...executed."
- "A man in prison waiting either to get out or be executed."
- "... it could just be about wishing to escape from how your life is just now."
- "'I see my light come shining from the west unto the east' is an apocalyptic reference. Most apocalyptic scriptures mention a light shining from the west to the east in the day when the truly good will be released from the pain of injustice and persecution."
- "[the song]...makes me wanna take a deep breath and be happy."
- "...maybe it's simply about being released from one's sins or wrong doings."
- "I think this song may be about suffering from a disease."

¹http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/I_Shall_Be_Released

²<http://www.songmeanings.net/lyric.php?lid=3458764513820551665>

They say ev'rything can be replaced,
Yet ev'ry distance is not near.
So I remember ev'ry face
Of ev'ry man who put me here.
I see my light come shining
From the west unto the east.
Any day now, any day now,
I shall be released.

We may experience various types of "prisons"...

- **Physical** – e.g., jails, rehab centers, nursing homes, institutions, any kind of involuntary confinement; debilitating addictions
- **Emotional/Psychological** – e.g., abusive marriage, mean boss, loneliness, hopelessness, despair, bitterness, unforgiveness
- **Spiritual** – e.g., "unforgivable sin", distorted view of God's character, feelings that God can't love them, won't accept them

They say ev'ry man needs protection,
They say ev'ry man must fall.
Yet I swear I see my reflection
Some place so high above this wall.
I see my light come shining
From the west unto the east.
Any day now, any day now,
I shall be released.

• Jesus is the ultimate Liberator...

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed" – Luke 4:18 (Isa. 61:1)

"...If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." – John 8:31b-32

"...where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" – 2 Corinthians 3:17b

Standing next to me in this lonely crowd,
Is a man who swears he's not to blame.
All day long I hear him shout so loud,
Crying out that he was framed.
I see my light come shining
From the west unto the east.
Any day now, any day now,
I shall be released.

Instruction to Christians...

- *"Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering"* – Hebrews 13:3, NIV
- *"...I was in prison and you came to visit me"* – Matthew 25:36b, NIV

Related Points and Scriptures:

We can expect consequences from society for wrongdoing: *"But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God."* – 1 Peter 2:20

Sin makes us prisoners: *"but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am!..."* -- Romans 7:23-24a

The world is imprisoned by sin: *"But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin..."* – Galatians 3:22a

The Apostle Paul was often imprisoned for his faith in Christ, as are many Christians around the world today: *"For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles –"* – Ephesians 3:1. *"...Remember my chains..."* – Colossians 4:18.

Final Thoughts:

Are you in prison today in some way? Jesus told us, *"...if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed"* – John 8:36. Our ministry team has witnessed much greater freedom in worship and spirit among incarcerated men and women whom Christ has set free from sin, than in many churches. God does not esteem prisoners above anyone else. Yet, there are thousands of hungry hearts in prison today – representing a mission field for those willing to shine God's light to them. Many, feeling abandoned and forgotten will reach for the Lord as their only hope during their times of deepest need. Let's remember to pray for them and minister as the Lord leads!