

Finding Divinity in the Music & Poetry of Bob Dylan

with Matt Flanagan

Why Bob Dylan?

- A famous singer-songwriter, author, and artist.
- Raised in the Jewish tradition.
- Became an openly born-again Christian in 1978.
- Awarded the 2016 Nobel Prize in literature.
- Many of his works were greatly influenced by the Bible.
- Described himself as a messenger.
- Others referred to him as an artist-prophet, but he was reluctant to accept that title, much as he had rejected the label of "protest singer."

What Bob has said:

Themes from a variety of works worked their way into many of my songs, either knowingly or unintentionally.

I don't have to know what a song means. I've written all kinds of things into my songs.

What I intend to do today:

- Take you on a musically meditative scriptural journey through the playing and lyrical analysis of selected Bob Dylan songs which are replete with biblical references both Old and New.
- Together we will listen to a selected Dylan song, following along with the lyrics provided, and making annotations in the margins where and whenever divinity reveals itself to us.
- At the end of each selection, we will share and discuss those revelations together, before moving on to additional selections.
- I will also be providing specific scriptural passages (both Old Testament and New) that I believe Bob might have been inspired by in crafting each song.

Ain't Talkin' (Modern Times, 2006)

Bob Dylan

As I walked out tonight in the mystic garden
The wounded flowers were dangling from the vine
I was passing by yon cool crystal fountain
Someone hit me from behind

Ain't talking, just walking
Through this weary world of woe
Heart burning, still yearning
No one on earth would ever know

They say prayer has the power to heal
So pray for me, mother
In the human heart an evil spirit can dwell
I am trying to love my neighbor and do good unto others
But oh, mother, things ain't going well

Ain't talking, just walking
I'll burn that bridge before you can cross
Heart burning, still yearning
There'll be no mercy for you once you've lost

Now I'm all worn down by weeping
My eyes are filled with tears, my lips are dry
If I catch my opponents ever sleeping
I'll just slaughter them where they lie

Ain't talking, just walking
Through the world mysterious and vague
Heart burning, still yearning
Walking through the cities of the plague.

Well, the whole world is filled with speculation
The whole wide world which people say is round
They will tear your mind away from contemplation
They will jump on your misfortune when you're down

Ain't talking, just walking
Eating hog eyed grease in a hog eyed town.
Heart burning, still yearning
Some day you'll be glad to have me around.

They will crush you with wealth and power
Every waking moment you could crack
I'll make the most of one last extra hour
I'll revenge my father's death then I'll step back

Ain't talking, just walking
Hand me down my walking cane.
Heart burning, still yearning
Got to get you out of my miserable brain.

All my loyal and my much-loved companions
They approve of me and share my code
I practice a faith that's been long abandoned
Ain't no altars on this long and lonesome road

Ain't talking, just walking
My mule is sick, my horse is blind.
Heart burning, still yearning
Thinking about that girl I left behind.

Well, it's bright in the heavens and the wheels are flying
Fame and honor never seem to fade
The fire gone out but the light is never dying
Who says I can't get heavenly aid?

Ain't talking, just walking
Carrying a dead man's shield
Heart burning, still yearning
Walking with a toothache in my heel

The suffering is unending
Every nook and cranny has its tears
I'm not playing, I'm not pretending
I'm not nursing any superfluous fears

Ain't talking, just walking
Walking ever since the other night.
Heart burning, still yearning
Walking until I'm clean out of sight.

As I walked out in the mystic garden
On a hot summer day, a hot summer lawn
Excuse me, ma'am, I beg your pardon
There's no one here, the gardener is gone

Ain't talking, just walking
Up the road, around the bend.
Heart burning, still yearning
In the last outback at the world's end

Not Dark Yet (Time Out Of Mind, 1997)

Bob Dylan

Shadows are fallin' and I've been here all day
It's too hot to sleep and time is runnin' away
Feel like my soul has turned into steel
I've still got the scars that the sun didn't heal
There's not even room enough to be anywhere
It's not dark yet but it's gettin' there

Well, my sense of humanity has gone down the drain
Behind every beautiful thing there's been some kind of pain
She wrote me a letter and she wrote it so kind
She put down in writin' what was in her mind
I just don't see why I should even care
It's not dark yet but it's gettin' there

Well, I've been to London and I been to gay Paris
I've followed the river and I got to the sea
I've been down on the bottom of the world full of lies
I ain't lookin' for nothin' in anyone's eyes
Sometimes my burden is more than I can bear
It's not dark yet but it's gettin' there

I was born here and I'll die here against my will
I know it looks like I'm movin' but I'm standin' still
Every nerve in my body is so naked and numb
I can't even remember what it was I came here to get away from
Don't even hear the murmur of a prayer
It's not dark yet but it's gettin' there

Oh, Sister (Rolling Tunder Revue, The Bootleg Series Vol. 5, recorded live 1975, released 2002)

Bob Dylan

Oh, sister, when I come to lie in your arms
You should not treat me like a stranger
Our Father would not like the way that you act
And you must realize the danger

Oh, sister, am I not a brother to you
And one deserving of affection?
And is our purpose not the same on this earth
To love and follow His direction?

We grew up together
From the cradle to the grave
We died and were reborn
And then mysteriously saved

Oh, sister, when I come to knock on your door
Don't turn away, you'll create sorrow
Time is an ocean but it ends at the shore
You may not see me tomorrow