

TEN VIRGINS

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https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Blake_Wise_And_Foolish_Virgins_1826.jpg

TEN VIRGINS

BLACKOUT

In the dark, a **VOICE**:

I'll begin with women, and a Cathedral.

The Cathedral is in Strasbourg, and it's widely regarded to be one of the finest examples of French Gothic architecture in the world. Victor Hugo described it as a gigantic and delicate marvel. Goethe, as a sublimely towering, wide-spreading tree of God. I'd say a red/brown, sandstone prayer, descended four hundred years from the clouds of heaven, immersing a soul in trances of awe and speechless respect.

Magnificent in nearly every aspect, the aspect I especially want to call your attention to is the southern portal of the western façade. There the Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins is depicted, with each of the virgins standing atop a separate Doric pillar built for her alone.

To each her own.

To me the soul of the soul of the Christian Gospels is found in Matthew 25, when Jesus tells his Disciples: God will come, as King, and will say to you: I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me drink. I was a stranger, and you took me in. Naked, you clothed me. Sick, you nursed me. In prison, you visited me. And they will ask: When? When did we do anything like that for you? And the King will answer: When you did so for one of the least of these, my sisters and brothers.

So, it's one of the Bible's greatest ironies that Matthew 25 begins with the parable of the ten virgins. Ten maidens, all waiting, together, for their marriage to a single bridegroom, the Prince of Heaven, who happens to be inexcusably late for the wedding. Word arrives at midnight that he's nearly there; and the ten lift up their oil lamps, and in their fresh bridal gowns and new shoes, they traipse out into the night to greet him.

But five of the brides-to-be were not so bright, bringing with them no back-up oil for their lamps; and by the time the bridegroom finally arrives, their lights have burned out, and they can't get them relit. They innocently ask the wise virgins to share; but no luck. They are left, still virgins, while the five and their Prince party by themselves within.

Now let me conclude with two blokes in a pub, one sitting by himself (whom we will refer to as the putative bridegroom), sipping a pint, when the other (whom we'll call Thomas, although his real name actually rhymes with Judas Priest) comes up to the table, with his pint.

Light.

THOMAS

All right?

BRIDEGROOM

All right.

THOMAS takes a seat. A brief pause as each take a sip of their ale.

THOMAS

I saw you, thinking here, alone.

BRIDEGROOM

Lots and lots.... To think about....
I'm getting married.

THOMAS

Well, congratulations, Mate!

BRIDEGROOM

Ta.

THOMAS

Are you okay?

BRIDEGROOM

Lots to think about.

THOMAS

When is it then? Your lucky day?

BRIDEGROOM

Tonight.

THOMAS

Tonight?!

BRIDEGROOM

Tonight.

THOMAS

It's nearly half ten. Are you marrying someone *tonight*?

BRIDEGROOM

You could say that.

THOMAS

I could say what? either you are, or you aren't....
What's her name?

BRIDEGROOM

Ten.

THOMAS

Ten?

Her name is a number?

Or the time? that's just gone past.

BRIDEGROOM

Ten virgins.

THOMAS

Are you telling me you're marrying *ten* girls? At a time?

BRIDEGROOM

Five bright ones, and five not-so-bright.

THOMAS

How can you do that?

It's against the law.

BRIDEGROOM

It's my religion.

THOMAS

What religion?

BRIDEGROOM

It doesn't have a name yet.

THOMAS

The best of British luck to ya, Mate.

BRIDEGROOM

Ta. I'll need it.

THOMAS

Poor bloke. How did it happen?

BRIDEGROOM

Somebody spread a rumor. That I'm a bridegroom from Heaven.

Can you believe?

THOMAS

I hope you know what you're doing.

It could be a wedding from Hell.

BRIDEGROOM

Tell me....

[*after a thoughtful pause*] Maybe they all won't qualify.

THOMAS

What does that mean?

BRIDEGROOM

They have to pass a test.

THOMAS

What kind of test?

BRIDEGROOM

Oil. They have to bring enough oil.

THOMAS

For you to *oil* them?

BRIDEGROOM

For their lamps. They're virgins, I told ya.

Maybe only half of them will.

THOMAS

Which half?

BRIDEGROOM

The half that love me most.

THOMAS

You measure love by the litre?

BRIDEGROOM

By the pint.

**The BRIDEGROOM finishes his pint,
and signals for another, which is served.**

THOMAS

It sounds a bit daft.

And maybe a bit dodgy as well.

Are you sure you want to do this?

It's quite late.

And what if the one who really loves you the most
doesn't have the money for more oil?

BRIDEGROOM

Broke, and I loaned you money for oil?
Is that what you mean?

THOMAS

You might say that.

BRIDEGROOM

[*beat*] If I only knew how to tell the foolish five to get on their bikes.
Without offending them too much.

THOMAS

Send them off to get more oil.
And when they come back, tell them you know them not.
They'll just think you're pissed.

BRIDEGROOM

What a good idea!

THOMAS

They're the lucky ones, you know.

BRIDEGROOM

Thought you might think that.

THOMAS

What I think is that maybe you should reconsider.
This marriage thing.
Go home. And do unto others as you would have them do unto you.
That's what I always say.

**They go on drinking together for a while.
Then the BRIDEGROOM rests his head
on his arms on the table. After a space of
time he sits bolt upright.**

BRIDEGROOM

O! My. God!
O! My. God!
I just had the most horrible dream.
You know, like one of those lucid dreams that seem to last hours,
but are actually over in a minute or two?

THOMAS

I've had a few. After I've been drinking a bit too much.

BRIDEGROOM

Haven't we both? But let me tell you....
The news was on, I was listening to. And there was a pandemic.
Followed by world war.
And then famines and earthquakes and other plagues. All over the place.
I was arrested and tortured.
Everybody everywhere hated me. And hated each other.
Preachers were crawling out of the woodwork, proclaiming the end of the world.
For real. This time.

THOMAS

I hate Doomsday Preachers. Always have.

BRIDEGROOM

The people in government were telling everybody to shelter in place.
Not to go outside, or touch anything. Especially not their faces.
And then I saw the sun go dark.
And the moon and stars start dropping out of the sky....

THOMAS

[*beat*] Then what happened?

BRIDEGROOM

They got me out of prison, and put me on a horse.
A wingèd horse, which flew up, into the clouds.
And there were angels flying alongside me. Some with sickles.
Some on horseback, too ... a white horse, a red one, a black one,
and a pale green one I knew was called "Armageddon."
And five beasts with wings ... one like a lion; one like a calf; one like a leopard,
but with the feet of a bear, and the face of a man; one like an eagle;
and the fifth, a slain lamb with seven horns and seven eyes, and a bleeding throat.
Then there was thunder, and the mighty blast of a trumpet.
I saw Jerusalem, surrounded by armies.
And people fleeing into the smoke and the hills.
And piles of dead bodies. Rotting. And trees burning everywhere. Australia.
Locusts streaming out of them. And scorpions flooding the ground like termites.
And the Mediterranean was a sea of blood.
And the sky was scorching, and my horse caught fire.
I got naked.
And was falling. And falling.
And falling, next to a pregnant woman having a baby.
And when I woke up, here I am.

THOMAS

It's a sign.

BRIDEGROOM

What kind of sign? do you think?

THOMAS

A dangerous one. Fear of getting somebody pregnant.
Like seeing the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse carrying assault weapons.
You better not be going to that wedding.

BRIDEGROOM

It was so real, and clear, I almost thought it had to be true....

[*beat*] I don't want to be alone tonight.

THOMAS

Then come home with me.

BRIDEGROOM

Really? Can I?

THOMAS

Absolutely. What's to lose?

BRIDEGROOM

Jesus, Mate, you're an ace.

They go on drinking into the dark.

END