**“The Waiting Slaves”**
(Mark 13:34-37 / Parallel - Matthew 24:42-51)

**Mark 13:34-37 (NIV):**
34 "It's like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with his assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch.
35 Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back—whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. 36 If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. 37 What I say to you, I say to everyone: 'Watch!'"

**Luke 12:35-38 (NIV):**
35 "Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, 36 like men waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him. 37 It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them. 38 It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the second or third watch of the night."

**Setting:**
The setting for the Parable of the Waiting Slaves (Mark 13:34-37), sometimes known as the Parable of the Doorkeeper, is that of an “eschatological” attitude. Jesus is speaking to His disciples about the signs of the end of the age prior to the parable on the “Mount of Olives opposite the temple” (13:3). The parable warns them to be spiritually ready and prepared at all times because the coming of the Son of Man is unknown. Mark 13:3 states, “As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John and Andrew asked him privately…” (NIV) and Luke 12:22 says, “Then Jesus said to his disciples…” (NIV), which tells a reader of these two synoptic gospels that Jesus was indeed speaking with His disciples. Jesus tells his disciples in Mark 13:5-27 of the things that will be a sign to them that the end of the age is coming. He gives them warnings of the “destruction of the temple, (13:1-2, 14-20); warnings about the coming of false messiahs, persecutions and natural disasters (13:4-8, 9-13, 21-23); and
a prophecy concerning the coming of the Son of Man (13:24-27)” (Hultgren 265). Just before the parable itself is what some consider another parable in Mark 13:28-32. There is some controversy as to whether or not the verses are actually a parable or a “lesson”. The Anchor Bible Commentary begins the verse’s commentary with, “If we conjecture that this was a parable…” (Mann 536) However, Bernard Brandon Scott, in his "Hear Then the Parable" seems to feel that the “parable is the opening transition to the final section on watchfulness” (Scott 339), and considers it a parable. Hultgren does not identify the “lesson” as a parable, but merely states, “then comes a series of sayings just prior to this parable: the sayings on the budding fig tree as a lesson on the signs of the times…” (Hultgren 265). The parable of the Waiting Slaves is the last of Jesus’ parables in Mark.

**Exegetical Analysis:**

The “literal” concepts between Mark and Luke are not very similar. In the NIV, RSV and KJV Bibles, Mark 13:34 immediately refers to the servants as being “put in charge” or “given authority”, specifically in the NIV translation the servants being “in charge, each with his assigned task, and (he) tells the one at the door to keep watch” (Mark 13:34). Whereas in Luke the parable begins with “Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, like men waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet…” (Luke 12:35-36). Luke does not refer to the people as servants, or as them being put in charge of something, but rather as men, who need to “be dressed and ready for service” and to “keep your (their) lamps burning”. One could imply that the men that Jesus is talking about could be referred to as servants, because Luke does use the term servant in verse 37. Therefore, it can be implied that in both books the author is using the same general idea of the servants waiting for their master.

The RSV translation of the Bible uses the term “doorkeeper” to refer to the servant the
master of the house has assigned to keep watch of the door in Mark 13:34. However, the NIV translation simply uses “the one at the door to keep watch” in Mark 13:34. The KJV translation uses the term, “porter” to refer to the one at the door, which, according to the Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels edited by James Hastings, porter means, “‘burden-bearer’ as well as ‘door keeper.’ ‘Janitor’ or ‘gate-keeper’ would be a better rendering. ‘Porters’ were employed to guard city gates, and to keep watch at the entrance of public buildings and of private houses” (Hastings 383). Hultgren implies that the original word was doorkeeper by presenting the Greek form of the work as it was in the original text. “Although the usual duty of a doorkeeper is to keep out possible intruders, here his assignment is to watch for the man’s return and to open the door when he arrives” (Hultgren 266). In the NIV translation of Mark 13:34, it can be implied that when the author speaks of “the one at the door to keep watch,” he is meaning the doorkeeper.

In Mark13:35, “Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh…” (KJV) the message is addressed to the disciples, “who alone make up the audience for the words of Jesus in Mark 13” (Hultgren 267). This verse of the parable (Mark 13:35) can be identified with Mark 13:32-33, “No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on your guard! Be Alert! You do not know when that time will come” (NIV), as the verse precedes the parable itself. A servant can not fall asleep when the master comes home, expecting him to be waiting for him; he needs to be prepared for him. Hultgren states, “…the ‘master of the house,’ and the metaphorical significance of (‘the master,’ but also ‘the Lord’) cannot be missed. The circumstances of the church in the evangelist’s own day are being addressed: members of the church must be spiritually vigilant, or prepared, for the coming of the Lord” (Hultgren 267).
**Message:**

The central idea of the parable is the need to be spiritually alive or vigilant, and being prepared at all times for the coming of the Lord. Jesus commands us in Mark 13:37, “What I say to you (the disciples), I say to everyone: Watch!” (NIV) we must not be spiritually lazy or relaxed, we must be prepared constantly for His coming. Hultgren proves an excellent point in stating, “…the declaration that Christ will come in glory is taken by many as a threat rather than as a promise of something good to anticipate” (Hultgren 267). We need to not only be watching, but excited and rejoicing, for it says in Luke 12:38, “It will be good for those servants whose master find them ready, even if he comes in the second or third watch of the night” (NIV). If we are spiritually prepared and vigilant, not lazy and unaware of the consequences of not being prepared, we have nothing to fear.

**Application:**

A way that one can begin to be spiritually vigilant is taking it to our Lord Jesus Christ in prayer, first and foremost. Spiritual vigilance can be achieved in the intimate relationship with Christ, and speaking to Jesus about being spiritually alive and vigilant. That has to be the first step in the process to actually realize that we need it and want it to be applied to our lives, because we really do not know when the Lord will return. Being spiritually ready for when the Lord will come prepares us not only for achieving our own salvation, but will help us to help others who need to urgently turn their sinful ways to Jesus Christ.
WORKS CITED


Generally well done, despite some formal errors of small substantive significance.

Grade: A-