

Dr. Dave Mathewson, Where Is His Coming?

Session 1, Problem of the Parousia, Delay, and Possible Solutions

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This is Dr. David Mathewson in his teaching on Where is His Coming? Session 1, Problem of the Parousia, Delay, and Possible Solutions.

I am Dave Mathewson, an associate professor of New Testament at Denver Seminary in Denver, Colorado, where we are filming this. One of my areas of interest is eschatology, particularly as seen in the book of Revelation.

One of my most recent books was on a topic related to eschatology, though it ranges much broader than just the book of Revelation, and that is the issue of the delay of the parousia, or the coming of Jesus Christ. The next few lectures we want to consider that subject across the New Testament and focusing on the New Testament, that is the issue of the delay of the parousia, or coming of Christ. When you read the New Testament you find, especially in the Gospels, Jesus Christ promising at times that he would be coming soon.

You find statements that seem to suggest that Jesus thought, or maybe thought, that he would come back, what theologians call, or using the terminology of systematic theology, his second coming, that Jesus would come back a second time, sometime within his own lifetime or even the lifetime of his disciples and his followers. Jesus says things that would lead you to believe that the promised kingdom from the Old Testament, the kingdom of God that Old Testament authors look forward to, that it was indeed near. And what did Jesus mean by that? Other New Testament authors will also see and seem to think that Jesus is coming back immediately.

And they say things that lead you to believe that they may have thought Jesus was going to return at his second coming sometime in their lifetime and in the lifetime of their readers. Yet the reality is Jesus hasn't come back. He did not come back in the first century, he did not come back in the second century, and now, in the 21st century, Jesus still has not come back.

So, how do we explain this? Or how do we think about this? When the biblical authors say Jesus is coming back soon, how soon is he coming back? Many of our church confessions, going all the way back to some of the early creedal statements, early confessional statements, such as the Apostles' Creed, and some of our ancient creeds, have a statement that they believe Jesus is going to come back and he's going to set up his kingdom, he's going to judge, bring judgment on the earth and bring salvation to his people. And our modern-day doctrinal statements in our churches,

though they're often way more detailed than you find in some of our early creeds, such as the Apostles' Creed, many of our doctrinal statements in our modern-day churches have a statement about the coming of Christ, that Jesus is going to return and set up his kingdom. So, the return of Christ at the end of history, which theologians again often call the second coming of Christ, to be distinguished from his first coming at his birth and his death and resurrection, the second coming of Christ features in a prominent and very important manner in our early creeds and in our modern day doctrinal statements.

This expectation of the end, the coming of the end, in both our doctrinal statements but also in the Bible themselves and biblical texts that seem to suggest that Jesus is coming soon, has fueled expectations of the soon return of Christ. Usually, what happens is we look out at current events going on in our day, and match them up with biblical prophecies and biblical texts, and the conclusion is that we must be living in a time of fulfillment. Those things that the Old Testament prophets saw, or Jesus predicted, or John saw in the book of Revelation are now coming to fulfillment.

And usually, then, that's followed by an attempt to predict how close we are to the end or even go further and set dates. Yet, all of these attempts have one thing in common. They've all failed.

They've all failed to come to pass. Whether very early attempts in the 3rd or 4th century or in the 15th or 16th century or in the 20th century and even more recent attempts in the 21st century to predict the end based on predictions of the New Testament that Christ was coming back and maybe he was coming soon. That has led to predictions of when this is going to come about.

But again, they all have that one thing in common. They've failed. And so time marches on, and 2,000 years later, nearly 2,000 years after the writings of the New Testament documents, here we still are.

And we're still waiting for an end that hasn't come. All of this actually stems from the New Testament documents themselves. The New Testament authors themselves seem to create this problem of an end that hasn't come.

As we've already said, the New Testament documents themselves, starting with the teaching of Jesus recorded in the Gospels, predict or suggest that Jesus is going to come back soon. They make statements that seem to suggest Jesus is coming back within the lifetime of the readers and within the lifetime of Jesus or the New Testament authors. The biblical texts themselves seem to create this crisis of the expectation of an end that has not yet come.

The issue with that and the problem that we want to address, or the reason we want to address this problem, is this problem of an end that hasn't come, this problem of

the New Testament authors and Jesus predicting an end, the soon return of Christ that has now not yet transpired nearly 2,000 years later, has initiated or created a crisis of faith in the lives of many people. Many of the people who read these texts and see that the New Testament authors and Jesus predict an end that hasn't come often respond to the Bible and treat it with extreme skepticism. Certainly, if Jesus got it wrong on this, and the New Testament authors were wrong on something like this, we really can't trust much of the rest of what they say.

If Jesus thought he was coming back soon and thought he was coming back within the lifetime of his followers, but then was wrong, or if the Apostle Paul thought that Christ was going to come back within his lifetime and the lifetime of his readers, and then was wrong, or James or the author of Revelation, John, if they thought Christ was going to come back soon, but he hasn't, and they were wrong, what does that say about the reliability of the teaching of Scripture itself? What does that say about the reliability of Jesus' teaching if they got it wrong on this? I've known many who have questioned their faith. I've known some who have even abandoned their faith on this issue alone. If Jesus and the New Testament authors were wrong, certainly, we can't trust Scripture.

As I've already said, just to sample some of the texts, the New Testament authors, and particularly the Gospels, make statements that lead you to think that Jesus must be coming back right away and make statements that presumably would have led the first authors and the first readers in the first century of Christianity to think Jesus was coming back right away. For example, at the very beginning of Jesus' ministry, in all three of the synoptic Gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Jesus makes a statement in Mark 1:15, Matthew 4:17, and Luke 4:43, at the very beginning of Jesus' adult ministry, he makes a statement, the time has come, Jesus said, the kingdom of God is near, repent and believe the good news. In what sense is the kingdom of God near? In what sense was it near? For the first readers, was Jesus predicting the end of the world, but then it never came about? Or what about statements such as this: in Mark 9:1, Matthew 16:28, and Luke 9:27, Jesus says, some of you standing here will not die before you see the kingdom of God coming in power and glory.

Again, that seems to say that Jesus thought that his end-time kingdom would arrive before some of his followers died, yet they all died. And apparently, Jesus' kingdom, the kingdom that the Old Testament prophets predicted was going to come, never arrived, and 2,000 years later nearly 2,000 years later, it still has not arrived. Other examples in Mark 13:30, Matthew 24:34, and Luke 21:31 are in Jesus' so-called eschatological discourse, or Olivet Discourse. We'll look at that later. Jesus made the statement that this generation would not pass away until all these things happened, in the context of Jesus talking about his return and coming kingdom.

Again, this generation, how should we understand that? Probably, I think, Jesus is talking about his contemporaries, his followers, his disciples, and those who were

present listening to him. Yet, they did pass away, and Christ's kingdom did not come to earth. The end of the world did not transpire.

But, moving outside of the Gospels, we find other places in the New Testament that say something similar, and by the way, we will deal with these passages in trying to answer the question, how should we understand these? Were Jesus and the New Testament authors predicting an end that didn't come, and they were simply wrong and mistaken? But, in 1 Corinthians 7.29, Paul makes this statement: the time is short. He encourages, as we'll see, those who are single to stay single because the time is short. Certainly, Paul thought that there was not much time left before Jesus' return.

Was Paul wrong? Or, what about a text like 1 Thessalonians 4.15-17, that famous passage that's often read at funerals, where Paul tells us that those who are dead will be raised first, and then he says, we, using the first-person plural, we who are alive will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air, an apparent reference to Jesus' second coming again. His coming at the end of history to bring salvation and judgment, to bring history to its culmination. Paul, by using we, seems to include himself as those who will be alive when that event happens, yet Paul dies and passes from the scene, and that coming never arrived.

Or what about a text like James 5:7? James tells his readers to be patient, for the coming of the Lord is near. The judge is standing at the door, he says. Yet, James and presumably his readers from the first century passed away without ever seeing the coming of the Lord taking place.

Or, 1 Peter 4:7. Peter says, the end of all things is near. The end of all things. Well, how near? Again, Peter died, we know, and presumably, all his readers passed from the scene without ever seeing the coming of Christ.

Moving to the very last book of the Bible, Revelation. In Revelation, chapter 1, verse 1, and verse 3, and in chapter 22, the very end of the book, in chapter 22 and verses 6, 10, and 20, John tells us certain events are near. Certain events are at hand.

And we even see him saying, Christ is coming sooner. Christ himself speaks at the end of the book of Revelation and says, I am coming soon. Yet, 2,000 years later, he hasn't come back.

And again, John and his readers have all presumably passed from the scene. And now, 2,000 years later, we are still waiting. Again, it's this tension, this issue, that's created a crisis of faith in many people.

A crisis, again, that the New Testament texts themselves seem to create. And again, for some Christians, this tension is just too much to bear. And many defect from their faith.

Many turn from their faith. Many abandon it or at least question it so seriously. Because of the inability to reconcile some of these texts that we just looked at and read.

And they could be multiplied. We could find other ones. But I think these are some of the major ones.

And their inability to understand how New Testament authors and Jesus seem to predict his return in the first century. And 2,000 years later, here we are still waiting. There have been numerous attempts to handle this issue and these New Testament texts.

And I want to just explore a few of these in kind of paving the way and setting the scene for how we are going to address this issue. But there have been a number of ways that these texts have been dealt with. And I have heard all of these in the church.

I have seen all of these on the bookshelves of our bookstores, such as Barnes and Noble. All of these are prominent and popular ways of answering and dealing with this issue of how certain New Testament texts and Jesus' teaching seem to predict an imminent return of Christ. A coming of Christ in the first century.

In the lifetime of Jesus and the apostles, their readers, their audience, and early first-century Christians, yet that has not taken place. How do they handle that? One way we have already looked at it is that, for many, that tension is just too much to bear.

They end up concluding that scripture must be wrong, that Jesus was mistaken, and that the apostles were mistaken. So, how can we trust Christianity? Isn't this Christianity thing just a big joke? If they got it wrong in something like this? A second way to deal with this question is just to ignore the problem. Many Christians are, but some of them are not aware of the problem.

But many just simply choose to ignore it and refuse to deal with it and busy themselves with or occupy themselves with other things or make a big grand sweeping statement that everything is going to pan out in the end. And simply sweep this issue under the rug and refuse to deal with it. But it still doesn't go away.

We still have these passages that we just read that seem to predict the soon return of Christ within his lifetime, within the readers and the apostles of the first century's

lifetime. Yet that never came about. A third way of dealing with it is a view that I call the failed prophecy view.

As this name suggests, Jesus and the apostles were wrong. When Jesus predicted that the kingdom of God was near, that end-time kingdom predicted by the Old Testament prophets, he was simply mistaken because it never materialized. When Jesus said that some of you standing here will not die until you see the kingdom of God coming in power and great glory, he was wrong.

When Paul thought that he might be alive when Jesus Christ returned at the Parousia, that he would be with those who would be caught up to meet the Lord in the air, he was simply wrong. When Paul thought that the time was short, he was making a prediction that turned out to be mistaken. After all, they're just human, so certainly, they could not know exactly when the end would take place.

This view is kind of attached first and foremost to a well-known New Testament scholar, a well-known theologian named Albert Schweitzer. Albert Schweitzer saw Jesus as kind of an apocalyptic preacher who predicted, as we find today, as prophecy gurus even in the 21st century are predicting the end of the world, yet it never comes about. That's what Jesus was doing.

Jesus thought that through his ministry and preaching, he would bring an end to the world, and the end of the world would arrive, yet it never transpired, and Jesus was mistaken; Jesus was wrong, and instead, he was put to death for his teaching and for his belief on the cross. A more modern-day example is some of the writings of a well-known individual named Bart Ehrman. You find a lot of his works in the Barnes & Noble bookstore and other bookstores, popular-level works.

Bart Ehrman also saw Jesus as an apocalyptic type of preacher. Again, Jesus simply predicted the future and was wrong and mistaken. Again, just like many of our modern-day prophecy preachers who predict the end time and set a date, it never comes about.

So, under this view, the failed prophecy view, Jesus is simply an apocalyptic type preacher just preaching the end, thought that the end would come in his lifetime, but he was wrong and ended up hanging on the cross and being put to death for it. This view obviously denies that there's a God who knows all things and a God who can intervene in history and bring about his coming. It denies that Jesus himself is God and portrays him just as a human being who was mistaken in his prediction of the end of the world.

So, obviously a view like this will not sit well with those who do hold to a high view of scripture as the word of God, who believe in a God who created all things, who knows all things, who intervenes in the world, and who will do so at the end to bring

history to its goal and its culmination. For those who believe that Jesus himself is God, this view will not sit well. I think there's a better way to look at the evidence.

Another view, a fourth view, is what I call the AD 70 view. If you remember, what happened in AD 70 was a rather tumultuous event and a rather significant event in first-century Christianity and first-century Judaism. That was the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple by the Romans in AD 70.

This view says that most of these texts, especially in the Gospels, but some of the other texts as well, in Paul's letters and in James and even in Revelation, some of these letters or documents or sayings of Jesus in the Gospels that seem to anticipate a soon return of Christ, do anticipate a soon return of Christ, but what Jesus is predicting is not his second coming at the end of history, but a closer coming, a coming in judgment to bring judgment on Jerusalem and to bring judgment on its temple, which did indeed happen in AD 70 when the Romans swooped in and came in and captured Jerusalem and destroyed the temple, AD 70. In that way, they make sense of this language of near and soon. How can the return of Christ be near and soon if it's referring to a second coming at the end of history that at least 2,000 years, almost 2,000 years after the writings of the New Testament, hasn't happened yet? Instead, they take the language of soonness and nearness literally and seriously and say, Jesus' coming was soon.

Jesus' coming was near, but what it's referring to is not his second coming at the end of history. It's a nearer coming, a closer coming, his coming in judgment upon Jerusalem in AD 70. One of the more well-known advocates of this view is N. T. Wright.

He's written quite a bit on this and sees Jesus' teaching, especially as predicting not his coming at the end of the history of the second coming. It's not that N. T. Wright doesn't believe that and doesn't think that's going to happen. He just doesn't think that's what Jesus is talking about when he anticipates his soon return, his coming, his parousia that is going to come within the lifetime of his readers.

Indeed, the readers of the New Testament did see this event. Most of them did when Jesus returned in judgment on Jerusalem in AD 70. Certainly, if you hold a high view of scripture where you think this Bible is the authoritative word of God and that there is a God who created all things, who knows all things, who can intervene in the history, this view is certainly preferable to the failed prophecy view where Jesus was simply predicting the end of the world and he was wrong and mistaken.

I would like to suggest we'll see that there are indeed many texts where Jesus and New Testament authors are addressing the issue of the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. My question is whether that accounts for all of the texts. We'll look at some of those texts later on.

A fifth view is what could be called the classical dispensational view. The classical dispensational view, to back up just a little bit, classical dispensationalism saw God working in specific periods of time in different ways throughout history. It was the same God, but God worked in different ways at different periods of time, different dispensations.

There was a dispensation of the law where God dealt with the law of God. God dealt with Israel under the old covenant and the law. Now, we're under the dispensation of the church.

In the future there will be a dispensation of the millennial kingdom. Dispensationalism saw God working in different ways during different periods of time throughout history. One of the things that classical dispensationalism was well known for is a distinction consistent with this idea of God working in different ways in different times of history, a distinction between the way God dealt with his people, Israel, and the way that God dealt with the church.

God had a set of promises that he gave to Israel. God has a different set of promises that he now gives to the church. He had one purpose for Israel, and now he has a different purpose for the church.

Kind of key to understanding this is that all of the Old Testament prophetic text predicted a coming kingdom where a son in the line of David, Jesus Christ, would sit on the throne and set up his kingdom over all the earth, and he would restore Israel as his people, as his nation. He would rule over them and establish a new covenant. Those things promised in the Old Testament, classical dispensationalism would say, that's exactly what Jesus offered.

Jesus did think that the kingdom of the promise in the Old Testament would come in his lifetime. The problem was Israel rejected it. So, Jesus delayed the promise of the kingdom to a time in the future, and instead, he instituted, God instituted the period of the church where he gathered the people to be his church made of people from all nations, Jews and Gentiles alike, who responded to Jesus Christ in faith.

Once the period of the church was over, God would once again offer that kingdom to Israel. So the very same kingdom Jesus is offering in the Gospels that Israel rejected, he delayed until a future day that has not yet come about, at least nearly 2,000 years later. But one day, God will offer that kingdom again through Jesus Christ, and Israel will accept it.

God will establish his kingdom. A son of David, Jesus Christ, will rule over Israel, and then a new covenant will be established with him. Now what that means is, those texts in the Gospels where Jesus says, the kingdom of God is near.

Many of you standing here will not taste death until you see the kingdom of God coming with great glory. All these things this generation will not pass away until you see all these things pass away. Why did Jesus say that? Because he actually was offering the kingdom.

If Israel had presumably accepted it, Jesus would have established his kingdom. Those promises would have become a reality. But because Israel rejected it, Jesus postponed it, withdrew the offer, and delayed it to a future day.

And in between that time is now the time of the church, the time we are still living in. Now, in some of the other New Testament texts, when Paul says, we who are alive and remain will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. When James says, be patient because the coming of the Lord draws near.

Or when 1 Peter 4:7 says, the end of all things is near. Or when Paul says the time is short. They're referring to a different event.

They're referring to an event known as the rapture of the church. That is, before Jesus repeats his offer and re-offers the promise that he delayed, God will rapture the people of the church away. Then, the offer will be made once more to Israel.

So again, first of all comes the initial offer in the first century, a true, real offer of the kingdom of God that Israel rejected. That got delayed to the future. In the meantime, God created a people made of Jew and Gentile, the church, that he will one day rapture away before he offers the kingdom again to Israel, before he restarts the prophetic clock and begins to deal with Israel again.

So, classical dispensationalism deals with this issue by saying there are two different comings. One is the second coming of Christ in the future for Israel, which would have happened in the first century, but it was delayed because they rejected it. The second one is a rapture that is for the church, Jews, and Gentiles.

Some well-known proponents of this view would be the old Scofield Study Bible that some of you may be familiar with, or the Ryrie Study Bible, or writings of John Walvoord and some of the older dispensational scholars and authors that promoted a view like this. Although it does solve the problem of some of those texts in the Gospels that do seem to predict a kingdom that would come in the lifetime of Jesus and the readers. It does solve that problem by saying Israel rejected it, so God had to delay it to the future.

It still struggles with those texts that they assign to the so-called rapture. If Paul says the time is short, or if he says we who are alive who are caught up to meet the Lord in the air, you still have to deal with how Paul seemed to think that that rapture was

going to happen in his lifetime. Or how was Peter convinced that the end of all things was near, if that's referring to the rapture?

So, it seems that the classical dispensational view has dealt with some texts, but other texts that they assign to the rapture passage that we await for as the church still creates a problem. Besides the fact that we'll look at it later, I'm not convinced that one should separate the rapture and the second coming of Christ. I'll suggest later that there is one coming of Christ. I think the New Testament looks forward to, not two, a rapture and a second coming.

So, I don't know that the classical dispensational view is very popular in a lot of our churches, though it is probably not known under that name. I'm not sure that it helps solve the problem. There's a sixth view and the last view that I want to consider briefly, and that is what is known as the conditional prophecy view.

There was a recent book that came out just a couple of years ago, edited by a scholar named Christopher Hayes. It was entitled *When the Son of Man Didn't Come*. And it was a rather lengthy investigation of this issue.

As far as I know, the first detailed book-length treatment of this issue of the delay of the coming of Christ. Why has the coming of Christ not taken place when first-century authors, New Testament authors, and Jesus' own teachings seem to think it would? In a wide variety of essays dealing with biblical texts, philosophical issues related to God's character and His sovereignty, and theological issues, basically, the book was arguing that the New Testament authors and Jesus did predict the soon return of Christ in their lifetime.

But that prediction was conditioned upon the response of the audience. A little bit like the classical dispensational view, the coming of Christ was indeed really offered in the first century, and it would have come about, yet the problem was not enough people responded and repented. People did not repent.

People did not respond. So, the offer got delayed and is continually being delayed until enough people respond in repentance and belief to Christ and the gospel. Only then will these promises come about.

So, it was a genuine offer. It was a genuine prediction that Jesus was going to come back in the first century. The only issue was it was conditioned upon people responding in faith and obedience because they rejected it, because they did not respond.

In Jesus' day and in the first century, and presumably continually today, the coming of Christ is delayed, giving people a chance to repent giving people a chance to respond to the gospel. That view places a lot of weight on 2 Peter 3, where Peter

himself suggests that the reason Christ has not come back yet is to give people a chance to repent. So those are some of the major views.

We could probably think of others, and inside some of those views, there's probably some variation. Yet, where do we go from here? If none of those views are completely adequate in and of themselves, or one or two of them are mostly wrong, where do we go from here? I would like to propose an explanation that will work out in the remainder of these lectures. An explanation that proposes a balance between the New Testament teaching on imminency, that is, that the coming of Christ was near and soon, and also the teaching on delay.

There are hints within the New Testament that Christ's coming might be delayed for a while. The church lived with this tension, and today we continue to live with this tension, of the tension between imminency and delay. That Christ could come back soon, accounting for the statements that you find in the gospels and elsewhere of the soon return of Christ.

Yet, at the same time, hints or indications throughout the New Testament of delay suggested that Christ might not or may not necessarily come back right away. That there might be a lapse of time or a delay before he returned. A couple of other things that I think are important to point out in dealing with this issue is also to understand that the emphasis on soonness and imminency, that Christ might return right away, even in the lifetime of his readers, was not for the purpose of predicting the end.

Jesus was not just a modern-day prophecy preacher, predicting, looking at the signs, and predicting when the end would come. I think, without exception, the New Testament, from the gospels to the book of Revelation, the New Testament emphasis on imminency, or the soon return of Christ, is always in the context of motivation for holy living. The emphasis on the soon return of Christ was to bring about holiness and sanctification and response in the life of the readers.

Not to predict the end or to determine how close they were to the end or how soon the end would take place. I think another key is to understand that from Matthew to Revelation, the New Testament authors, beginning with Jesus himself, his own teaching, New Testament authors thought they were already living in the end. That the first coming of Christ, the end-time kingdom, promised and predicted by the Old Testament prophets, had already been inaugurated with the first coming of Christ.

Jesus' first coming, with his death and his resurrection, already inaugurated the end times. So that the New Testament authors technically do not wait for the end. They're not anticipating the end, they're already living in the end.

They're just waiting for the final consummation, they're waiting for the wrap up of the end times, in which they already live. And I think the key is to synthesize and put

all those together. Now, what we're going to do in the rest of this, the rest of this lecture, and the following lectures is to look at and explore some of these passages, not all of them, but the major passages, many that we referred to earlier, that seem to predict or anticipate a soon return of Christ in the first-century reader's own lives, lifetime, yet that did not come about.

Look at those texts in some detail and provide an explanation as to how we can reconcile those with an understanding of Scripture as the authoritative word of God. Reconcile those with a God who speaks truth and does not lie, a God who is sovereign, a Christ who is himself God, a God who knows all things from beginning to end. How does that square with text such as these? So, in the rest of this time, we will look at some of these New Testament texts, unpack them in a little bit of detail, and attempt to synthesize their teaching as it relates to this issue of the delay of the parousia and what that says about the reliability of Scripture, the trustworthiness of Scripture, the trustworthiness of Jesus himself and God's own character, and the trustworthiness of the teachings of Jesus' followers and his apostles.

Before we begin to look at the Gospels, I just want to make a couple of comments on some assumptions that I'll make and terminology. First of all, I will assume that the New Testament books are indeed written by the authors who claim to write them. I know some New Testament books, it's common with some New Testament scholars to deny that Peter wrote 2 Peter or Paul wrote some of the letters that his name is attached to.

But I will assume without arguing for or mentioning over and over again that Paul did indeed write all the letters attributed to him, that Peter and John and those whose books are attributed to their name, that indeed those are the authors that wrote them. The Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, technically don't come with names attached to them in the documents themselves. But I think a good case can be made that the early attestation of early Christianity as to an early church tradition as to who wrote those Gospels is reliable.

And so I will operate with the assumption that the traditional names of the authors attached to these books, whether in the documents themselves or by church tradition, is the correct view of the authorship of these books. A second, as far as terminology, is the word parousia. I will often use the word parousia or Christ's coming or his second coming.

Sometimes I'll distinguish that from Christ's first coming, which is obviously when he came to be born, to become incarnate, to die and be raised again. But I will use the words second coming, parousia, and coming of Christ synonymously. The word parousia comes from the Greek word meaning presence or coming.

And although it had a rather general meaning in first century Greek, the New Testament authors use it exclusively of the end time coming or appearance or arrival of Jesus Christ at the end of history to bring history to a close and to bring judgment and to bring salvation. Again, systematic theologians usually refer to that as his second coming. So, I'll use the word parousia, coming of Christ, second coming synonymously or to refer to the same event.

The coming of Christ is second coming at the end of history. Another assumption that I've already addressed is I do not distinguish between a second coming and a rapture, although that's common with the classical dispensational view and others that fall within the school of dispensationalism. Even a lot of popular Christianity that is not aware of dispensationalism often distinguishes between the rapture of the church, where Christ will catch us up, and then later on, the second coming of Christ to inaugurate his kingdom.

Again, I will not draw that distinction. I think the rapture, the catching up from 1 Thessalonians 4, and the second coming of Christ are the same event, that there's only one coming at the very end of history. So those are some of the assumptions that I will operate with and some clarification on some of the terminology.

So, let's jump right into the Gospels. What I want to focus on is some of the sayings of Jesus. We've mentioned some of them already in the introduction.

Some of the sayings of Jesus seem to indicate that the end was near, that seem to indicate that Jesus Christ Parousia, his second coming, was going to happen right away, in Jesus' own lifetime even, or within the lifetime of his disciples. And the starting point, I think, is to look at the issue of the arrival of the kingdom. Jesus taught in the Gospels in numerous places that the kingdom of God was near, that the kingdom of God was about to break onto the scene.

Now it's important to understand what Jesus was offering when he offered the kingdom of God. What was the kingdom? Again, you find that terminology, kingdom of God, kingdom of heaven. And by the way, another terminological clarification here is that I don't distinguish between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven.

I think they're both referring to the exact same thing, although some have distinguished those two. Part of the reason is that you see in one gospel Jesus talking about the kingdom of God, another gospel in the exact same place, with the exact same event, the exact same saying of Jesus will say the kingdom of heaven. Certainly, those two weren't two separate kingdoms.

So, what did Jesus mean when he offered the kingdom of God or kingdom of heaven? First, it's important to understand that the kingdom of God is not a location.

It's not a place or a geographical area. Today, we think of the kingdom of heaven or some other country that calls itself a kingdom.

The kingdom of God was not a geographical area. Not that it didn't have any relationship to earth, but it wasn't primarily confined to a geographical area like the land of Palestine. Also, the kingdom of God is not a period of time.

It doesn't primarily refer to a period of time in the future, such as the millennial kingdom, as some want to limit it to. The kingdom of God did not primarily refer to a time period in the present or someday in the future. So, what was the kingdom? Basically, the word kingdom of God referred to God's sovereign rule, his kingly power.

It was more as George Eldon Ladd, a well-known New Testament theologian from years past, popularized this view that the kingdom of God referred to God's kingly reign, his power, his kingly power. It referred to the dynamic act of reigning. In the Lord's prayer in Matthew chapter 6, Jesus says to his disciples, pray this, Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom comes, you will be done on earth as it is in heaven. That is, God's kingdom is basically his will being accomplished. It is God's kingly reign, his rule over all things.

So, it's not referring primarily to a period of time. It's not primarily referring to a location, a geographical realm. It's referring dynamically to God's reign, his rule, his kingly power that he will exercise over people and over the earth.

The notion of the kingdom of God goes back to the Old Testament. So, when Jesus comes proclaiming the kingdom of God, where does he get this? What is he offering, and what would his readers have understood? What is interesting is that Jesus doesn't sit down and say, now the kingdom of God is near. Let me tell you what that means.

Jesus assumes that his readers will largely understand what it is he's offering. And the place to go to is the Old Testament. The Old Testament anticipates a coming kingdom, a time where God would reign over all creation, where God's reign would spread over all the earth, where he would reign over all the nations, he would bring salvation to his people, he would judge the nations, his enemies would be defeated, a king in the line of David, a Messiah would sit on the throne and rule over his people, Israel would be restored, the Messiah would rule over them, God would establish a new covenant with them and dwell in their midst.

This was the kingdom that the Old Testament prophets anticipated. You can read of this in texts like Ezekiel chapters 36 and 37, but most of all, the Old Testament

prophecies anticipate a coming kingdom of God with these components of God reigning over all the peoples, over all creation, through his Messiah in the line of David, over his restored people, Israel, defeating their enemies and establishing a new covenant relationship with them. This was the kingdom that the Old Testament prophets promised, and this was the kingdom, presumably, then that Jesus was offering.

But again, part of the issue is this kingdom didn't seem to arrive. The text that we read from Mark chapter 1 and verse 15, Matthew chapter 4 and verse 17, and Luke 4 verse 43, are the texts that begin the adult ministry of Jesus and seem to characterize this is Jesus' teaching. This is the burden of Jesus teaching, that the kingdom of God promised by the Old Testament prophets is now near. How do we understand that since that kingdom did not yet come, it did not come in the first century, and apparently 2,000 years later, it still has not arrived? Because didn't Jesus say the time is at hand? The time of fulfillment is at hand.

Repent because the kingdom of God is near. That kingdom promised in the Old Testament is near. Yet, in what sense was the kingdom near? In what sense was Jesus proclaiming the nearness of this kingdom of God that the Old Testament prophets predicted? Again, it was George Eldon Ladd that I think solved the issue, at least at a popular level.

Some have taken these texts to say, well, Jesus was wrong; that kingdom did not come. Jesus thought he was going to usher in that end-time kingdom predicted by the prophets, but it never happened. Jesus was simply mistaken.

But George Eldon Ladd introduced this concept that has almost become a cliché but is still very true, and that is this concept of the already and the not yet. That Jesus did indeed offer the kingdom of God and it was indeed already present. But it was only inaugurated in initial partial form in advance of a future day when Christ would return, a day that we associate with the second coming, a day when he would come, a not yet when he would come and bring the kingdom in its fullness.

So, the solution is when Jesus says the kingdom of God is near. In some of these texts, not all of them, there are other texts we have to deal with, but at least these texts at the beginning of Jesus ministry and many other texts in the New Testament where Jesus suggests the kingdom is near, men and women can enter it now. Jesus was speaking the truth. The kingdom was indeed near.

It was indeed present but not in its final form, in its partial inaugurated form. Matthew, Mark, Luke and I would suggest the rest of the New Testament are all in agreement that the future kingdom of God predicted in the Old Testament was already a reality. It was already inaugurated.

Men and women could already enter the reign. Remember, it's not a period of time. It's not a geographical area.

It's the reign, the kingly rule of God through his Messiah Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ, that Messiah is now present, and he's already offering that kingdom. Men and women can already enter that kingdom and experience its blessings in advance of the future final manifestation of it, one day at his second coming.

The first coming of Christ, his birth, his miracles, his ministry, his teaching, his death and his resurrection inaugurated the kingdom, set it in motion. It was already being fulfilled. Men and women could already experience the blessings.

But there's a day to come when it will come in its fullness and its perfection and its finality. That's the not yet part. So, I think that's the way we should understand Jesus' teaching about the kingdom of God.

At least many texts that, not all of them, there are others we have to look at, but many of the texts like these ones at the beginning of Jesus' ministry when he said the time is being fulfilled. The kingdom of God is near. Men and women could enter it now.

Later on in Matthew chapter 12, Jesus will say, if I cast out demons by the name of Beelzebub, Satan, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. Or if I cast out demons by the name of Satan, he says, by whose authority does he cast them out? But if I cast out demons by the spirit of God, the kingdom of God has come upon you. By casting out demons by the power of God's spirit, and by the way, the Holy Spirit, the presence of the Holy Spirit was part of the new covenant, part of the kingdom of God promised by Old Testament authors.

With the presence of the spirit in Jesus' ministry to defeat Satan, to cast out demons, Christ's kingdom promised in the Old Testament, God's kingdom was already invading the kingdom of Satan. That was demonstrated by Jesus casting out demons. So, there's no need to conclude from these texts that indicate that the kingdom of God is already present.

That Jesus was offering a kingdom that was, in some sense, already near. It's not necessary to conclude that Jesus promised a kingdom that never materialized, and, therefore, he was wrong. No, the kingdom did materialize.

It was present. It was a reality. But not in its final perfect form.

It was only inaugurated and realized in partial form in advance of and in anticipation of the day when it would arrive in its fullness and completion. This is a very important concept to grasp because, number one, as I said, all the rest of the New

Testament authors, I think, assume this. But number two, as we've already said, it's because of this idea that New Testament authors thought they were already living in the end.

And by thought, I don't mean that they thought they were, but they really were. But it was based on this teaching of Jesus that the kingdom of God was already near. That the New Testament authors were convinced the end had already arrived.

They weren't waiting for the end to come. They were already in the end. Just awaiting its consummation and awaiting its wrap-up at the second coming of Christ.

In the next lecture, we will consider some of the other texts from the Gospels and the teachings of Jesus that seem to point to the coming of Christ or the coming kingdom, the end times, the end time kingdom, the second coming of Christ as parousia, within the lifetime of the disciples. Such as when Jesus says, some of you standing here will not die until you see the kingdom coming in its fullness. Or, this generation will not pass away until all these things happen.

How do we understand texts like that? Well, we'll examine those texts in a little bit of detail in the next lecture.

This is Dr. David Mathewson in his teaching on Where Is His Coming? Session 1, Problem of the Parousia, Delay and Possible Solutions.