

Dr. David Mathewson, Where is His Coming? Session 2, Delay of the Parousia in Jesus' Teaching Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Mathewson, Where is His Coming? Session 2, Delay of the Parousia in Jesus' Teaching, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. David Mathewson's teaching addresses the perceived delay of the Parousia (the second coming of Christ) in Jesus' teachings within the Gospels. He examines Gospel passages that some interpret as Jesus predicting his imminent return, which did not occur. Mathewson analyzes these sayings, considering alternative interpretations such as the inaugurated kingdom, the transfiguration, the coming of the Holy Spirit, and the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. He argues that Jesus' pronouncements should not be viewed as failed predictions but rather as teachings emphasizing the nearness of the kingdom and the need for vigilance, even if a delay occurs. Through analyzing the Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24-25 and parables about watchful servants and waiting maidens, Mathewson highlights Jesus' focus on responsible living rather than specific timelines for his return. Ultimately, the lecture suggests that Jesus' teachings encouraged preparedness for both an immediate return and a potential delay, without making erroneous predictions about the timing of the Parousia.

2. 23 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Mathewson, Where is His Coming? Session 2 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Theology → Where is His Coming).



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Session02.mp3**

3. Briefing Document: Mathewson, Where is His Coming?

Session 2, Delay of the Parousia in Jesus' Teaching

Briefing Document: Dr. Dave Mathewson on the Delay of the Parousia in Jesus' Teaching (Session 2)

Executive Summary:

This session by Dr. Mathewson examines Gospel passages often interpreted as Jesus predicting his imminent return within his disciples' lifetime, which did not come to pass. Mathewson argues against the conclusion that Jesus was mistaken. Instead, he proposes several alternative interpretations for these sayings, emphasizing Jesus' teaching on the inaugurated Kingdom of God, symbolic interpretations of "coming," and the importance of vigilance regardless of the timing of the final consummation. He analyzes specific passages like Matthew 16:28, Matthew 10:23, and the Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24-25), offering interpretations that avoid the "failed prophecy" conclusion.

Main Themes and Important Ideas:

1. The Inaugurated Kingdom vs. the Future Consummation:

- Mathewson reiterates his previous point that Jesus' teaching on the "nearness of the kingdom" at the beginning of his ministry (Matthew, Mark, Luke) did not signify an immediate end of the world.
- Instead, Jesus was announcing the present reality of the end-time kingdom prophesied in the Old Testament, but in an "inaugurated initial form" through his ministry, death, and resurrection.
- The final form of the kingdom will be established at the second coming.
- This framework helps explain Gospel statements that seem to indicate both a present and a future reality of the Kingdom.

1. Reinterpreting Problematic Sayings: Mathewson addresses specific verses often cited as evidence of Jesus' misprediction:

- **Matthew 16:28 ("some standing here will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom")):**
- He reviews and critiques several common interpretations, including:

- Reference to Jesus' resurrection and exaltation (possible but the "some" is problematic).
- Reference to the Holy Spirit's coming at Pentecost (possible but the "some" is still an issue).
- Reference to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 (less clear in this specific context).
- A general reference to the coming of the Spirit, spread of the gospel, and establishment of the kingdom.
- **Mathewson's Preferred Interpretation:** This verse refers to the **Transfiguration**, which immediately follows this saying in all three Synoptic Gospels. The Transfiguration offered Peter, James, and John a "glimpse" or "preview" of Jesus' coming in his final eschatological glory, connecting to Old Testament themes of the Son of Man's glory (Daniel 7). "It does seem to make clear that this is a snapshot of a preview of Jesus coming in his final eschatological glory, and only a few did get to witness that in the form of transfiguration."
- **Matthew 10:23 ("you will not have gone through the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes"):**
 - He acknowledges Schweitzer's view that this indicates a failed prediction of an imminent return.
 - He critiques the interpretation that it refers to the resurrection, finding the language "a rather odd way to refer to Jesus' resurrection."
 - He acknowledges the AD 70 destruction interpretation as possible.
 - **Mathewson's Preferred Interpretation:** This verse refers to the **parousia (second coming)** but within the context of a dual-phased mission in Matthew 10. Verses 1-15 describe a short-term, focused mission to Israel, while verses 16 onwards broaden to a long-term mission extending until Christ's return. The saying in verse 23 serves as an "encouragement" and instills "urgency" for the ongoing, "unfinished mission to Israel that the disciples and their followers must engage in" alongside the mission to the Gentiles. "It simply reminds them that alongside of their mission to the Gentiles, there will always be an unfinished mission to Israel that the disciples and their followers must engage in. And so, this verse is more of an encouragement to continue that and an urgency to continue that rather than a prediction of the end or how close the end is."

- **Matthew 24 (Olivet Discourse):**
- Mathewson outlines different interpretations of this chapter (all AD 70, all future, a mix). He favors a mixed view where verses 4-22 describe the general characteristics of the church age (including the specific event of the AD 70 destruction of Jerusalem), and verses 29-31 describe the future second coming.
- **Matthew 24:34 ("this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things take place"):**
- He clarifies that "this generation" refers to Jesus' contemporaries.
- He argues against "all these things" referring to the second coming (verses 29-31) because verse 33 would then be nonsensical ("when you see the second coming occur, know that the second coming is near").
- **Mathewson's Interpretation:** "All these things" in verse 34 refer back to "all these things" in verse 33, which in turn refer to the events described in verses 4-22 (wars, famines, earthquakes, persecution, the destruction of Jerusalem). Jesus' point is that his followers *would* see these things happen in their lifetime, indicating that the end times had been inaugurated and his return was now a possibility at any time. "Jesus' point is simply that when you see all these things happen, know that the Son of Man is near. Know that he's right at the door." This is not a prediction of *when* he would return but a statement about the imminence in light of these signs.
- **Matthew 24:29 ("immediately after the distress of those days..."):**
- Mathewson argues that "the distress of those days" likely refers to the entire period described in verses 4-22, not just the AD 70 destruction.
- Therefore, the second coming will occur after this entire period of tribulation, however long it may last. Jesus is not giving a specific timeline.
- 1. **The Purpose of Jesus' Eschatological Teaching:**
- Mathewson emphasizes that Jesus' primary concern in his eschatological discourse and parables is not to provide a precise timeline or predictable signs of his return.
- Instead, the focus is on **vigilance, responsible living, and being good stewards** in light of the certainty of his return, whenever it may occur.

- He highlights the parables at the end of Matthew 24 (Watchful Servant) and the beginning of Matthew 25 (Ten Maidens) as illustrating this point.
- The Watchful Servant parable warns against assuming the master's delay and being unprepared for a sooner-than-expected return.
- The Ten Maidens parable warns against assuming an immediate return and being unprepared for a longer-than-expected delay.
- These parables demonstrate that Jesus himself acknowledged the possibility of both a perceived "delay" and the need for constant readiness. "The point is that you need to be prepared for both. The disciples need to be prepared in case Christ comes back sooner than they think... But they also need to be prepared for a delay."

1. **Avoiding the "Failed Prophecy" Conclusion:**

- Mathewson strongly argues against the interpretation that Jesus made erroneous predictions about the timing of his return.
- He offers alternative, theologically consistent readings of the key passages that align with a view of the New Testament as the Word of God and Jesus as God himself.

Key Quotes:

- "We suggested that Jesus' teaching on the nearness of the kingdom did not mean that Jesus thought that the end of the world would take place very soon within his lifetime but that the end-time kingdom prophesied and anticipated in the Old Testament prophets was indeed present. It was indeed a reality, but in inaugurated initial form in advance of the final form."
- "Truly, I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom." (Matthew 16:28) - Analyzed extensively with the Transfiguration as the preferred interpretation.
- "For truly I tell you, you will not have gone through the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes." (Matthew 10:23) - Interpreted as urging urgency in the ongoing mission to Israel until the parousia.
- "Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things take place." (Matthew 24:34) - "All these things" refers to the events of verses 4-22, which the disciples did witness.

- "Now concerning that day and hour, no one knows, neither the angels nor the son except the father alone." (Matthew 24:36) - Used to frame the uncertainty of the timing and the need for constant readiness illustrated in the parables.
- "But if that wicked servant says in his heart, my master is delayed..." (Matthew 24:48) - Highlights the issue of assuming delay and being unprepared.
- "Now concerning that day and hour no one knows..." (Matthew 24:36)
- "...the groom was delayed." (Matthew 25:5) - Shows Jesus acknowledging the possibility of a perceived delay.

Conclusion:

Dr. Mathewson effectively argues that the Gospel sayings concerning the timing of Jesus' return should not be interpreted as failed prophecies. By understanding the concept of the inaugurated Kingdom, considering symbolic interpretations, and focusing on the overarching message of vigilance, a more theologically coherent understanding of Jesus' teaching emerges. The perceived delay of the parousia is not a sign of Jesus' error but rather a reality that his teachings and parables anticipated and addressed, emphasizing the constant need for faith and obedience until his return.

4. Study Guide: Mathewson, Where is His Coming? Session 2, Delay of the Parousia in Jesus' Teaching

Study Guide: Delay of the Parousia in Jesus' Teaching

Quiz:

1. According to Mathewson, what was the initial understanding of Jesus' teaching on the nearness of the kingdom in the Synoptic Gospels?
2. What is the main challenge in interpreting Matthew 16:28, and what is Mathewson's preferred interpretation of "the Son of Man coming in his kingdom" in this verse?
3. Explain Albert Schweitzer's view on Jesus' prediction in Matthew 10:23 and Mathewson's counter-argument regarding the scope of Jesus' commission in that chapter.
4. What are the two questions the disciples ask Jesus in Matthew 24, and how does Mathewson suggest Jesus addresses these questions throughout Matthew 24 and 25?
5. What are the three main approaches to interpreting the Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24-25) that Mathewson discusses?
6. In Mathewson's interpretation of Matthew 24:34 ("this generation will not pass away until all these things take place"), to what does "this generation" refer, and what are "all these things"?
7. How does Mathewson interpret the phrase "immediately after the distress of those days" in Matthew 24:29 in relation to the timing of the second coming?
8. Describe the main point of the parable of the watchful servant (Matthew 24:45-51) in the context of the delay of the parousia.
9. What is the central issue in the parable of the ten maidens (Matthew 25:1-13), and how does it offer a different perspective on the timing of Christ's return compared to the parable of the watchful servant?
10. According to Mathewson, what is the primary purpose of Jesus' teaching in the Olivet Discourse and the parables that follow it?

Quiz Answer Key:

1. Initially, some understood Jesus' teaching on the nearness of the kingdom to mean that the end of the world would occur very soon within his lifetime. However, Mathewson argues that Jesus meant the end-time kingdom prophesied in the Old Testament was present in an initial, inaugurated form through his ministry.
2. The main challenge in Matthew 16:28 is that Jesus says some of his disciples would not taste death before seeing the Son of Man coming in his kingdom, which seemingly did not occur as a final parousia within their lifetimes. Mathewson prefers the interpretation that this refers to the transfiguration, which immediately follows this saying in all three synoptic Gospels and provided a preview of Christ's glory.
3. Albert Schweitzer believed Jesus was mistaken in predicting his return within his disciples' lifetime in Matthew 10:23, viewing Jesus as a failed apocalyptic preacher. Mathewson argues that Jesus' commission to his disciples in Matthew 10 has both a short-term focus (verses 1-15) and a broader, longer-term perspective (verses 16-end), encompassing an ongoing mission to Israel until the parousia, without specifying an immediate timeframe.
4. The disciples ask when the destruction of the temple will occur and what the sign of Jesus' coming and the end of the age will be. Mathewson suggests Jesus answers both: the events of Matthew 24:4-22 (including the destruction of Jerusalem) address the first, while Matthew 24:29-31 describes the second coming.
5. Mathewson discusses three main approaches: the preterist view (all events in Matthew 24 refer to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70), the futurist view (all events refer to a future tribulation period), and a mixed view (Matthew 24:4-22 describe events throughout the church age, culminating in AD 70, while Matthew 24:29-31 describe the future second coming).
6. In Mathewson's view, "this generation" refers to Jesus' contemporaries, those listening to him. "All these things" refers to the events described in Matthew 24:4-22: wars, rumors of wars, famines, earthquakes, and the destruction of Jerusalem, which Jesus' disciples did witness.
7. Mathewson believes "immediately after the distress of those days" in Matthew 24:29 refers to the entire period of distress characterized by the events of Matthew 24:4-22, including the destruction of Jerusalem. The second coming will

occur after this entire period, but the length of this period is not specified by Jesus.

8. The parable of the watchful servant emphasizes the need for constant readiness and faithful living in light of the master's return, which could happen unexpectedly and sooner than anticipated. It warns against complacency and neglecting one's responsibilities due to a perceived delay.
9. The central issue in the parable of the ten maidens is the unexpected delay of the bridegroom. It highlights the importance of being prepared for a longer-than-anticipated waiting period, contrasting with the watchful servant parable by emphasizing readiness for a potential delay rather than just an immediate return.
10. According to Mathewson, the primary purpose of Jesus' teaching in the Olivet Discourse and the subsequent parables is not to provide a precise timeline of future events or signs to predict his return. Instead, it is to instill in his followers the need for vigilance, responsible living, and holiness in light of the certainty of his eventual return, whether it occurs sooner or later than they expect.

Essay Format Questions:

1. Analyze the various interpretations of Matthew 16:28 concerning the timing of the kingdom's coming. Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of at least three different views presented by Mathewson, and explain why he favors his preferred interpretation.
2. Compare and contrast Mathewson's interpretation of Matthew 10:23 with Albert Schweitzer's view. How does Mathewson's understanding of the scope of Jesus' commission influence his conclusion regarding the delay of the parousia?
3. Discuss the structure and interpretation of Jesus' Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24-25) as presented by Mathewson. How does he reconcile seemingly imminent predictions with the historical delay of the parousia, and what is the significance of the disciples' initial questions?
4. Examine Mathewson's interpretation of Matthew 24:34 and 24:29 in light of the delay of the parousia. How does he explain these verses without concluding that Jesus made a false prediction? What role does the destruction of Jerusalem play in his analysis?
5. Analyze the parables of the watchful servant and the ten maidens (Matthew 24:45-51 and Matthew 25:1-13) in relation to the theme of the delay of the parousia. What distinct lessons does each parable offer regarding how believers should live in anticipation of Christ's return?

Glossary of Key Terms:

- **Parousia:** A Greek term commonly used in the New Testament to refer to the second coming or return of Jesus Christ.
- **Synoptic Gospels:** The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, which share a similar perspective and contain many of the same stories, often presented in a similar sequence and wording.
- **Inaugurated Kingdom:** The concept that the kingdom of God, while not yet fully realized in its ultimate and glorious form, was initiated or began during Jesus' earthly ministry, death, and resurrection.
- **Eschatological Discourse (Olivet Discourse):** Jesus' extensive teaching about the end times, his second coming, and related events, recorded primarily in Matthew 24-25, Mark 13, and Luke 21, delivered on the Mount of Olives.
- **Transfiguration:** A pivotal event in the Gospels where Jesus was miraculously transformed and appeared in glory alongside Moses and Elijah before Peter, James, and John.
- **AD 70:** The year in which the Roman army destroyed Jerusalem and the Second Temple, a significant event in Jewish history that is often referenced in interpretations of biblical prophecy.
- **Albert Schweitzer:** A theologian and physician known for his work on the "quest for the historical Jesus," who famously argued that Jesus was a failed apocalyptic prophet.
- **N.T. Wright:** A contemporary New Testament scholar who advocates for a primarily preterist interpretation of the Olivet Discourse, seeing many of its prophecies fulfilled in the events surrounding the destruction of Jerusalem.
- **Classical Dispensationalism:** A theological system that emphasizes a strict distinction between Israel and the Church and typically interprets much of biblical prophecy as yet to be literally fulfilled in the future.
- **Vigilance:** The state of being watchful and alert, especially in anticipation of something; a key theme in Jesus' teaching regarding his return.

5. FAQs on Mathewson, Where is His Coming? Session 2, Delay of the Parousia in Jesus' Teaching, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions: The Delay of the Parousia in Jesus' Teaching

1. What initial statements did Jesus make in the Gospels that might suggest an immanent return? Jesus' adult ministry begins in the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) with the proclamation that "the time is near" or "the time is at hand," and "the kingdom of God is near." He calls for repentance in light of this nearness.

2. How does Dr. Mathewson interpret Jesus' teaching on the nearness of the kingdom?

Dr. Mathewson argues that Jesus' statements about the nearness of the kingdom did not mean he anticipated an immediate end to the world within his lifetime. Instead, Jesus was announcing that the end-time kingdom prophesied in the Old Testament was arriving in an "inaugurated initial form" through his ministry, death, and resurrection. This initial phase precedes the "final form" of the kingdom, which will be established at the second coming. Therefore, statements about the kingdom being both present and future reflect this two-stage arrival.

3. What is the challenge presented by Matthew 16:28 (and parallel verses) regarding Jesus' prediction of his coming in the kingdom?

In Matthew 16:28, Jesus tells his disciples that some of them would not taste death before they saw the Son of Man coming in his kingdom. This has led some to believe that Jesus predicted his return would occur within the lifetime of some of his followers, a prediction that did not literally come to pass.

4. What are some alternative interpretations of Matthew 16:28 that avoid the conclusion that Jesus made a mistaken prediction? Dr. Mathewson outlines several alternative interpretations: * **The Resurrection and Exaltation:** This view sees the "coming in his kingdom" as a reference to Jesus' resurrection and his ascension to heaven, where he began his messianic reign. However, the phrase "some standing here" makes this interpretation less straightforward. * **The Coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2):** This interpretation suggests that the disciples saw the kingdom come in power with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, fulfilling Old Testament prophecies of the coming day of the Lord. Again, the "some standing here" phrase poses a slight challenge. * **The Destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70:** Some argue that the "coming in his kingdom" refers to Jesus' coming in judgment upon Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple. * **A Combination of Events:** This view proposes a broader understanding, where the "coming in his kingdom" encompasses the coming of the Spirit, the spread of the gospel, and the establishment of God's kingdom through the church. * **The Transfiguration:** Dr. Mathewson favors this view, arguing that the transfiguration, which immediately follows this saying in all three Synoptic Gospels, was a preview or glimpse of Jesus' future glory as the Son of Man in his kingdom, witnessed by Peter, James, and John.

5. How is Matthew 10:23, where Jesus tells his disciples they will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes, often interpreted as a problematic prediction? This verse, within the context of Jesus commissioning his disciples for a mission to Israel, seems to suggest that Jesus expected his return before they completed their journey. The fact that Jesus did not return within their lifetime has been used to argue that he made a false prediction.

6. What are Dr. Mathewson's arguments against interpreting Matthew 10:23 as a failed prediction? Dr. Mathewson suggests that Jesus' commission in Matthew 10 can be divided into a short-term mission (verses 5-15) focused narrowly on Israel, and a broader, longer-term mission (verses 16-end) that extends beyond Israel and anticipates persecution before governing authorities. He argues that verse 23 refers to the ongoing nature of the mission to Israel that would continue until the Son of Man returns. It is not necessarily a prediction of an immediate return but rather an encouragement and a reminder of the urgency of this mission in light of the future second coming. He also notes that the kingdom had already been inaugurated, creating an urgency for evangelism while they awaited its consummation.

7. How does Dr. Mathewson interpret Jesus' statements in Matthew 24, particularly verses 29-31 and 34, concerning the timing of his coming? Dr. Mathewson interprets Matthew 24 as addressing two questions from the disciples: when the temple would be destroyed and what the sign of Jesus' coming and the end of the age would be. He sees verses 4-22 as describing events characterizing the church age, including the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, which answered the first question. Verses 29-31, with their cosmic disturbances and the Son of Man coming in glory, refer to the second coming of Christ at the end of history, answering the second question. Regarding verse 34 ("This generation will certainly not pass away until all these things take place"), Dr. Mathewson believes "all these things" in this context refer back to the events described in verses 4-22 (wars, famines, earthquakes, the destruction of Jerusalem), which the generation Jesus was addressing did witness. He argues that verse 33 ("when you see all these things, recognize that he is near at the door") supports this, as it would be nonsensical to say that after seeing the actual second coming, one should know it is near. Therefore, Jesus was not predicting an immediate second coming within their lifetime but rather stating that once these preceding events occurred, his return could happen at any time.

8. How do the parables at the end of Matthew 24 and the beginning of Matthew 25 (the watchful servant and the ten maidens) provide insight into the perceived delay of the parousia? The parable of the watchful servant (Matthew 24:45-51) highlights the danger of assuming the master's return will be delayed, leading to irresponsible behavior. Conversely, the parable of the ten maidens (Matthew 25:1-13) illustrates the need to be prepared even if the bridegroom (representing Christ) delays his coming longer than expected. Dr. Mathewson argues that these two parables together teach that believers must be prepared for both possibilities – an earlier than expected return and a longer than anticipated delay – because the timing of Christ's return is unknown. This underscores the importance of vigilance and faithful living, regardless of the perceived timing of the parousia, and demonstrates that Jesus himself acknowledged the possibility of a delay.