**Dr. David Mathewson, Where is His Coming? Session 4,
Delay of the Parousia in the General Epistles
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 4, Delay of the Parousia in the General Epistles, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL**

This source presents a lecture by Dr. Dave Mathewson exploring the New Testament's perspective on the timing of Christ's return, particularly the apparent delay. **Mathewson analyzes passages in the general epistles (James, Peter, John) and Revelation that seem to suggest an imminent return.** He argues that these authors, much like Jesus and Paul, operated within an understanding of **inaugurated eschatology, believing they were already in the end times.** Therefore, their statements about Christ's soon coming were not necessarily precise predictions but rather emphasized the **potential for his return at any moment, urging ethical living and faithfulness.** The lecture suggests Revelation further develops this theme, balancing the idea of imminence with the possibility of a delay, a topic to be explored in a subsequent session.

**2. 13 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of
Dr. Mathewson, Where is His Coming? Session 4 – 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).**



**3. Briefing Document: Mathewson, Where is His Coming? Session 4, Delay of the Parousia in the General Epistles**

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**Briefing Document: The Delay of the Parousia in the General Epistles and Revelation**

**Executive Summary:** This briefing document summarizes the main themes and arguments presented by Dr. Dave Mathewson in Session 4 of his teaching series, "Where is His Coming?". This session focuses on the concept of the delayed Parousia (Second Coming of Christ) as addressed in the General Epistles (Hebrews through 3 John) and the Book of Revelation. Mathewson argues that while many New Testament texts anticipate the soon return of Christ, the issue of delay was already present in the first century. He contends that the General Epistles and Revelation don't represent failed predictions of an immediate return, but rather reflect the theological concept of "inaugurated eschatology" – the belief that the end times began with Christ's first coming, making his second coming a potential reality at any moment. This perspective serves as a motivation for ethical living and patient endurance, rather than a precise timeline of future events. Revelation, while containing strong language of imminence ("coming soon"), should be understood as a symbolic book offering ethical exhortation relevant to its first-century audience, balancing the idea of soonness with an implied possibility of delay (to be explored further in the next session).

**Main Themes and Important Ideas/Facts:**

**1. The Problem of Delay is Not Modern:**

* Mathewson highlights that the question of why Christ had not yet returned was already a concern in the first century.
* He points to 2 Peter 3 as a key passage addressing this delay, with false teachers questioning, "Where is the promise of his coming?"
* 2 Peter offers two main reasons for the delay:
* God's different perspective on time: "God does not see delay from the same standpoint that we do."
* God's patience allowing for repentance.

**2. The General Epistles and the Expectation of Soonness:**

* Mathewson examines three texts (James 5:8, 1 Peter 4:7, 1 John 2:17-18) that seem to anticipate Christ's near return.
* **James 5:8:** Calls for patience because "the coming of the Lord is near." Mathewson suggests this refers to the Second Coming, viewed as imminent due to the inaugurated end times, serving as a motivation for the oppressed to wait for God's justice.
* **1 Peter 4:7:** States, "The end of all things is near." This is interpreted as reflecting the common New Testament perspective of already living in the end times, making Christ's return a possibility at any moment, thus urging ethical urgency.
* **1 John 2:18:** Declares, "Children, it is the last hour," evidenced by the appearance of "many Antichrists." John uses "last hour" to signify the inaugurated end times, leading to the passing away of the world and its desires.

**3. Inaugurated Eschatology:**

* Mathewson emphasizes that these authors operated within the framework of inaugurated eschatology: "the end has already been inaugurated with the first coming of Christ as death and resurrection."
* This perspective means that Christ's second coming could occur at any time to conclude the already-begun end times.
* The "soonness" of Christ's return is not necessarily a prediction of an immediate event within their lifetime but reflects this reality of living in the end.

**4. Ethical Motivation, Not Prediction:**

* A crucial point is that the emphasis on the soon return of Christ in these epistles serves as an ethical motivation for believers to live godly, patient, and responsible lives.
* The authors are not primarily predicting the exact timing of Christ's return, and therefore their writings should not be seen as failed prophecies.
* For example, James encourages patience and refraining from revenge, while Peter urges vigilance and holy living. John calls for avoidance of deception and worldly desires.

**5. Introduction to Revelation: A Unique Apocalyptic Prophecy:**

* Mathewson introduces Revelation as a book dealing with the "wrap-up of God's redemptive plan."
* He stresses the importance of understanding its literary genre: an apocalypse characterized by symbolic language and visions.
* He also defines prophecy not solely as foretelling (predicting the future) but also as forth-telling (announcing a message to the present audience, calling them to faithfulness).
* Mathewson argues that Revelation was intended to be understood by its first-century readers and provided a framework for understanding their current context within the Roman Empire.

**6. Soonness in Revelation:**

* Mathewson highlights the frequent use of "soon" and "near" at the beginning and end of Revelation:
* Revelation 1:1: "what must soon take place."
* Revelation 1:3: "because the time is near."
* Revelation 22:7 (Jesus): "look, I am coming soon."
* Revelation 22:12 (Jesus): "look, I am coming soon, and my reward is with me."
* Revelation 22:20 (Jesus): "yes, I am coming soon."
* He acknowledges the apparent contradiction between these statements and the subsequent 2000-year delay.

**7. Interpreting the "Soonness" in Revelation:**

* Mathewson dismisses the idea that "soon" should be translated as "quickly" in the sense of the manner of Christ's return. He believes "soon" is the more accurate translation.
* He also finds it unlikely that all references to "soonness" in Revelation refer solely to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, especially considering the likely later date of Revelation's writing and the content of chapters 19-22.

**8. Revelation and Inaugurated Eschatology (Reiterated):**

* Mathewson argues that the "soonness" in Revelation should also be understood within the framework of inaugurated eschatology.
* John and his readers believed they were already living in the end times, making Christ's return a genuine possibility at any moment.
* Therefore, the promises of Christ coming "soon" are not necessarily predictions of an immediate event but reflect the imminence of the final consummation of a reality that had already begun.

**9. Ethical Urgency in Revelation:**

* Similar to the General Epistles, the emphasis on the soon return of Christ in Revelation serves to instill ethical urgency in its readers.
* John encourages faithfulness to Jesus and resistance against the pressures and temptations of the Roman Empire, knowing that Christ could return at any time to bring judgment and reward.
* Predicting the exact timing of the end is not John's primary concern.

**10. Soonness in the Letters to the Seven Churches (Revelation 2-3):**

* Mathewson examines statements like "I will come to you quickly/soon" (Revelation 2:16 to Pergamum) and "I am coming soon" (Revelation 3:11 to Philadelphia).
* He suggests that Revelation 2:16 could refer to Christ's judgment upon the church in history.
* Revelation 3:11, with its connection to end-time rewards and the New Jerusalem (3:12), likely refers to the Second Coming.
* However, these pronouncements are still viewed through the lens of inaugurated eschatology and ethical exhortation, not as failed predictions of an immediate return.

**11. Conclusion on Revelation's Perspective:**

* John lives with the expectation of Christ's soon return because he believes they are already in the end times.
* This perspective motivates faithful living and resistance to compromise.
* John is not focused on predicting the exact timing of Christ's return.

**Next Steps (Preview):**

* The following lecture will explore another theme in Revelation that balances the emphasis on imminence: the possibility of delay.
* The series will then conclude with theological and pastoral implications of the delay of the Parousia in the New Testament.

**Key Quotes:**

* **2 Peter 3 on God's perspective of time:** "God does not see delay from the same standpoint that we do."
* **James 5:8 on the nearness of the Parousia:** "the coming of the Lord is near or is drawing near."
* **1 Peter 4:7 on the nearness of the end:** "the end of all things is near."
* **1 John 2:18 on the last hour:** "Children, it is the last hour."
* **Revelation 1:1 on what must soon take place:** "what must soon take place."
* **Revelation 22:7 (Jesus) on his imminent return:** "look, I am coming soon."
* **Mathewson on the purpose of Revelation's pronouncements of soonness:** "meant to indicate that those events are there to instill urgency in the readers to live life responsibly because they're already in the end."

This briefing document provides a concise overview of Dr. Mathewson's arguments in this session, highlighting his interpretation of the "delay" and "soonness" of Christ's return within the context of inaugurated eschatology and the primary purpose of ethical formation in the General Epistles and the Book of Revelation.

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**4.** **Study Guide: Mathewson, Where is His Coming? Session 4, Delay of the Parousia in the General Epistles**

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**Study Guide: The Delay of the Parousia in the General Epistles and Revelation**

**Key Concepts:**

* **Parousia:** The second coming or arrival of Jesus Christ.
* **Delay of the Parousia:** The issue of why Christ has not yet returned despite the expectation of his imminent return in the early church.
* **Inaugurated Eschatology:** The theological understanding that the end times were inaugurated with the first coming, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The kingdom of God is both a present reality and a future hope.
* **Soonness/Nearness:** Language used in the New Testament to describe the anticipation of Christ's return.
* **Ethical Urgency:** The idea that the expectation of Christ's return should motivate believers to live holy and responsible lives.
* **Apocalypse:** A genre of literature (like Revelation) characterized by visions, symbolic language, and often dealing with eschatological themes.
* **Prophecy (Foretelling vs. Forth-telling):** Foretelling is predicting the future, while forth-telling is proclaiming a message to the present audience, often calling for faithfulness. Revelation is understood primarily as forth-telling.

**Key Texts:**

* **2 Peter 3:** Addresses the question of the delay of Christ's coming, explaining it in terms of God's different perspective on time and his desire for people to repent.
* **James 5:8:** Encourages patience among suffering Christians because the Lord's coming (parousia) is near.
* **1 Peter 4:7:** States that "the end of all things is near," emphasizing the urgency of godly living.
* **1 John 2:17-18:** Declares that it is the "last hour," indicated by the appearance of "many Antichrists," signifying the inaugurated end times.
* **Hebrews 10:25:** (Mentioned as another relevant text) Likely connected to the encouragement of meeting together as the "Day" approaches, suggesting a sense of nearness.
* **Revelation 1:1, 3; 22:7, 12, 20:** Contains multiple statements about events that "must soon take place" and Jesus' promise "I am coming soon."
* **Revelation 2-3 (Letters to the Seven Churches):** Includes promises of Christ coming "quickly" or "soon" to specific churches.

**Study Questions:**

1. What was the primary issue addressed in 2 Peter 3, and what were the two main reasons given for the perceived delay of Christ's return?
2. How does James 5:8 use the idea of the nearness of the Lord's coming to encourage his readers, and what is the context of this encouragement?
3. According to the lecture, how should we understand Peter's statement in 1 Peter 4:7 that "the end of all things is near"?
4. What does John mean by referring to his time as the "last hour" in 1 John 2:18, and what evidence does he provide for this claim?
5. Explain the concept of "inaugurated eschatology" and how it helps to understand the New Testament's language about the soon return of Christ.
6. According to the lecture, what are the two main ways to understand the "soonness" statements in Revelation 1:1, 3 and 22:7, 12, 20?
7. Why does the lecturer argue against interpreting all the "soonness" statements in Revelation as solely referring to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD?
8. How does the genre of "apocalypse" and the function of "prophecy" (forth-telling) influence our interpretation of Revelation's statements about the end times?
9. In what ways did the New Testament authors use the expectation of Christ's soon return as a motivation for ethical living among believers? Provide specific examples from the discussed texts.
10. How does the lecturer address the apparent contradiction between the early church's expectation of Christ's imminent return and the fact that he has not yet returned after 2000 years?

**Quiz: Delay of the Parousia**

1. According to 2 Peter 3, what are the two primary reasons why believers might perceive a "delay" in Christ's coming?
2. In the context of James 5, who were the original readers, and how does the anticipated "parousia" relate to their specific situation?
3. How does the concept of "inaugurated eschatology" explain why New Testament authors could speak of living in the "end times" even during the first century?
4. In 1 John 2:18, what does John mean by the phrase "the last hour," and what evidence does he present to support this assertion?
5. What are the key characteristics of the apocalyptic genre, and how does this inform our reading of the book of Revelation regarding the timing of future events?
6. What is the distinction between "foretelling" and "forth-telling" in the context of biblical prophecy, and which is considered more dominant in Revelation?
7. Provide one example from the letters to the seven churches in Revelation (chapters 2-3) where the "soon" coming of Christ is mentioned, and briefly explain a possible interpretation of this statement.
8. According to the lecture, what was the primary purpose behind John's use of "soonness" language in the book of Revelation, beyond simply predicting a timeline?
9. How does the lecturer address the challenge posed by Jesus' repeated promises of coming "soon" in Revelation 22, given the historical passage of time?
10. Briefly explain how the New Testament authors utilized the expectation of the parousia to encourage specific ethical behaviors within their respective audiences.

**Quiz Answer Key: Delay of the Parousia**

1. According to 2 Peter 3, the reasons for the perceived delay are that God's perspective on time is vastly different from our finite human perspective, and that God is patiently waiting to give humanity more time to repent.
2. The original readers of James 5 were poor day laborers suffering oppression from wealthy landowners. The anticipated parousia is presented as a time when the Lord will bring justice and vindication for their suffering.
3. Inaugurated eschatology explains that with Jesus' first coming, death, and resurrection, the "end times" were already set in motion. Therefore, first-century believers were living in this inaugurated "end," awaiting its final consummation.
4. By "the last hour," John means the end times that have already begun with the coming of Christ. He sees the presence of "many Antichrists" (those opposing Christ and promoting false teaching) as evidence of this.
5. The apocalyptic genre is characterized by symbolic visions, often involving bizarre imagery, and typically addresses both the present circumstances and future eschatological events. This suggests that Revelation's timing statements might be symbolic and tied to the readers' contemporary situation as well as the ultimate future.
6. "Foretelling" is predicting future events, while "forth-telling" is proclaiming a message of truth and exhortation to the present audience. Revelation is understood primarily as forth-telling, focused on calling believers to faithfulness.
7. In Revelation 3:11, Jesus tells the church in Philadelphia, "I am coming soon." This could be interpreted as an encouragement to persevere in their faithfulness because Christ's return, and their reward, could happen at any moment, or it could refer to Christ coming in judgment or vindication within their historical context.
8. Beyond predicting a specific timeline, John's primary purpose in using "soonness" language was to instill a sense of ethical urgency in his readers, urging them to remain faithful to Christ and resist compromise with the surrounding culture, particularly the Roman Empire.
9. The lecturer argues that the "soon" in Revelation 22 should be understood within the context of inaugurated eschatology. Christ's coming is always "soon" because the end times have already begun, and the final consummation could occur at any point. It's not necessarily a prediction of immediate return within a specific timeframe.
10. The New Testament authors used the expectation of the parousia to encourage patience in suffering (James), sober-mindedness and prayer (1 Peter), perseverance against false teachings (1 John), and faithful endurance in the face of persecution (Revelation).

 **Essay Format Questions:**

1. Analyze the different ways in which the concept of the "nearness" of Christ's coming is presented and utilized in at least three of the General Epistles discussed in the lecture (James, 1 Peter, 1 John). How do these presentations address the specific circumstances and challenges faced by their original audiences?
2. Discuss the significance of the literary genre of "apocalypse" in understanding the timing and meaning of the events described in the book of Revelation, particularly concerning the statements about Christ's "soon" return. How does the distinction between "foretelling" and "forth-telling" contribute to this understanding?
3. Compare and contrast the explanations provided in 2 Peter 3 and the book of Revelation for the apparent "delay" of the parousia. What theological insights do these texts offer regarding God's timing and the believer's response?
4. Explore the ethical implications of the New Testament's emphasis on the "soon" return of Christ. How did this expectation function as a motivator for godly living and faithful witness in the early church, as illustrated in the General Epistles and Revelation?
5. Critically evaluate the lecturer's argument that the New Testament authors, including John in Revelation, were not making failed predictions about the immediate return of Christ. How does the concept of inaugurated eschatology and the intended purpose of these writings support this perspective?

**Glossary of Key Terms:**

* **Apocalypse:** A literary genre characterized by symbolic visions, often revealing heavenly secrets and eschatological events, intended to provide hope and encouragement in times of crisis.
* **Delay of the Parousia:** The theological question arising from the apparent postponement of Christ's expected second coming, causing concern and prompting theological explanations in the early church.
* **Eschatology:** The branch of theology concerned with the end times, including the second coming of Christ, judgment, resurrection, and the final state of creation.
* **Ethical Urgency:** The sense of immediate importance and necessity for moral action and responsible living, often motivated by the anticipation of a significant future event like Christ's return.
* **Foretelling:** Prophecy focused on predicting future events or outcomes.
* **Forth-telling:** Prophecy focused on declaring God's message to the present audience, often involving exhortation, correction, and calls to faithfulness.
* **Inaugurated Eschatology:** The theological understanding that the end times began with the first coming of Jesus Christ, his death, and resurrection. The kingdom of God is thus both a present reality and a future consummation.
* **Parousia:** A Greek term commonly used in the New Testament to refer to the second coming or visible return of Jesus Christ.
* **Prophecy:** Communication from God to humanity, which can include both foretelling and forth-telling, aimed at guiding, correcting, and encouraging God's people.
* **Soonness/Nearness:** Language used in the New Testament to convey the anticipation that Christ's return and the culmination of God's plan are not distant but could occur at any time, given the inaugurated nature of the end times.

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**5. FAQs on Mathewson, Where is His Coming? Session 4, Delay of the Parousia in the General Epistles, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)**
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**Frequently Asked Questions: The Timing of Christ's Return in the New Testament**

**1. Why did the early New Testament writers seem to expect the imminent return of Christ?**

The early New Testament writers, including Jesus himself, operated within a theological framework known as "inaugurated eschatology." This perspective held that the end times, prophesied in the Old Testament, had already begun with the first coming, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Because the end had already been set in motion, they believed that the final culmination of these end times, marked by Christ's return in glory (the *parousia*), could occur at any moment. This wasn't necessarily a prediction of a specific timeframe but rather an understanding that they were living in the "last days" and the concluding events could unfold swiftly.

**2. How do texts in the General Epistles, like James 5:8, 1 Peter 4:7, and 1 John 2:18, reflect this expectation of Christ's soon return?**

These passages echo the theme of the nearness of Christ's coming. James 5:8 urges patience because "the coming of the Lord is near," using spatial imagery of a judge standing at the door, suggesting imminence. 1 Peter 4:7 declares that "the end of all things is near," reflecting a compressed view of time in light of the inaugurated end. 1 John 2:18 states, "Children, it is the last hour," indicating a conviction that they were already living in the end times, evidenced by the appearance of "many Antichrists." These statements weren't necessarily predictions of an immediate return but rather affirmations that the end had begun and its conclusion could happen at any time.

**3. Does the New Testament acknowledge or address the apparent delay of Christ's return?**

Yes, the New Testament does address the issue of delay. 2 Peter 3 directly confronts the question raised by false teachers: "Where is the promise of his coming?" It offers two primary reasons for the perceived delay: God's different perspective on time (as the eternal God sees time in its entirety) and His patience, allowing humanity more time for repentance. Additionally, texts like the entire book of Acts and 2 Thessalonians hint at a potential unfolding of events before Christ's return, suggesting that the early expectation of imminence didn't preclude the possibility of a more protracted period.

**4. How does the book of Revelation contribute to the discussion about the timing of Christ's return?**

Revelation contains numerous statements at its beginning and end, such as "what must soon take place" (Revelation 1:1) and Jesus' repeated promise, "I am coming soon" (Revelation 22:7, 12, 20). These declarations reinforce the idea of the nearness of the events described, including the second coming of Christ. However, these pronouncements are best understood not as precise predictions of an immediate return that failed to materialize, but as affirmations of the inaugurated end times. Because the end had begun with Christ's first coming, the final consummation was always potentially "soon."

**5. Are the "soon" statements in Revelation failed prophecies given the extended time that has passed?**

No, the "soon" statements in Revelation are not necessarily failed prophecies. They should be interpreted within the context of inaugurated eschatology and the literary genre of apocalyptic prophecy, which uses symbolic language to communicate spiritual realities and ethical imperatives. The "soonness" emphasizes the certainty and potential imminence of Christ's return from God's perspective within the already unfolding end times. Furthermore, these statements serve to instill ethical urgency in believers, encouraging them to remain faithful and obedient regardless of when the final return occurs.

**6. How do the messages to the seven churches in Revelation (chapters 2-3) relate to the theme of Christ's soon return?**

The letters to the seven churches contain statements like "I am coming to you quickly" (Revelation 2:16) and "I am coming soon" (Revelation 3:11). Some of these could refer to Christ's coming in judgment upon specific churches in the first century due to their unfaithfulness. Others, particularly those linked to promises of future reward and the new creation, likely point towards the final second coming. In either case, these pronouncements, like the bookends of Revelation, function not as precise timelines but as reminders of Christ's authority and the need for constant vigilance and faithfulness in light of the already present end times.

**7. What is the primary purpose of the New Testament's emphasis on the nearness of Christ's return, according to these sources?**

The primary purpose of this emphasis is not to provide a precise prediction of when Christ would return. Instead, it serves as a powerful ethical motivator for believers. The awareness that Christ could return at any moment calls for constant readiness, godly living, patience in the face of suffering, and unwavering faithfulness to Jesus Christ in the present. This perspective encourages believers to prioritize eternal values over temporal ones and to live with a sense of urgency and accountability.

**8. How should Christians today understand the New Testament's teaching on the timing of Christ's return in light of the ongoing delay?**

Christians today should understand the New Testament's teaching through the lens of inaugurated eschatology. We are still living in the "last days" that began with Christ's first coming. The promises of his soon return emphasize the certainty of his coming and the need for constant preparedness and faithful living. The apparent delay reminds us of God's patience and His eternal perspective on time. Our focus should not be on predicting the exact moment of his return but on living lives that are pleasing to Him, remaining steadfast in our faith, and being actively engaged in His mission until He comes.

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