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## ***The Absent Advent Season***

For much of my life, I twisted the doctrine of Christ's Coming into the myth of Christ's Absence. I ended up building my whole life around the Myth of the God Who Isn't Here Yet. And it is shocking how much it has messed me up.

The dark power of this myth is that it provides an easy (but false) answer to the pain in my human experience: Why am I miserable? Simple: "I am miserable because God isn't here. God left because I'm bad. So now God lets bad people hurt me. But someday God will come back and stop them. On that day when God stops the cause of my misery, I will stop feeling miserable."

This mythology is attractive to me because it reinforces my neurotic worldview of Victimhood: "I am a victim. Someone Else is the cause of my misery. And someday in the future, Someone Else will be the solution. In the meantime, my problems (and the problems of the world) are unfixable. There is no reason for me to even attempt the painful work of self-discovery, honesty, vulnerability, and reconciliation. But everything will be okay when Christ returns. Someone Else broke me, and someday, Someone Else will fix me. Easy."

The Gospel judges me by challenging this mythology. If Immanuel is real, if God is truly with me, then why am I still miserable? If Christ is truly present in the world, then why hasn't he fixed my sadness? If Saint Paul is telling the truth when he says that that I already live everyday in the lavish embrace of Father, receiving every spiritual blessing at His right hand, then why do I feel abandoned and deprived?

Could it be that my feelings of abandonment and deprivation are just my natural emotional responses to lies I have chosen to believe? Could it be that God has already given me what I need for a life of love, joy, and peace?

The Gospel gives me the unwelcome news that I am miserable because I am blind, and that I am blind because I refuse to see. That as I live and move and have my being in the incarnate Christ who has included me in his life forever, I am free to believe lies and experience the results of distorted thinking. That my Father is already with me forever, patiently (and painfully) allowing me to learn from my own mistakes, slowly chipping away at the lies that have encrusted my soul. That Jesus (even when he appears in glory) will NEVER violate my personhood by forcing me to see reality and feel happy about it.

Advent is not about how Christ will someday decide to cause my happiness by changing his location. His location is just fine. He is at the Father's right hand, and I am right there with him. He is already in me, unleashing his wrath upon the darkness within me and around me.

As the Spirit teaches me to believe this good news, He sets me free to join the incarnate Christ in FACING reality instead of escaping from it. It is in facing reality that I face my Father. And under my Father's gaze of relentless affection, his Spirit is patiently teaching me to put down my defenses of blaming, self-justification and denial. And as His face shines upon me and is gracious to me, the Triune Life truly does COME to me. The incarnate Son's love/joy/peace HAS COME into the

world, and the whole world WILL COME to know Him. “The glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.” (Isaiah 40:5)

Christ is come. Come, Lord Jesus.

*~ John Stonecypher*