

# FEAST OF THE MOST HOLY NAME OF JESUS

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As a young child I remember being highly suspicious of the expression, "It's better to give than to receive," probably because I thought that what my parents were *really* saying was "You're not going to get what you want for Christmas."

- Of course, as my understanding of Christmas has matured, not only have my suspicions *faded*, I've been blessed to *experience* that it's actually *true*.
- It *is* better to give than to receive, and that's *not* limited to the *Christmas* season either.
- So in his letter to the Philippians, Paul is showing us that growing up in the *faith* means setting aside our *suspensions* and living our whole *lives* that way.

The primary theme of the letter is holiness or "Christ-mindedness," as Paul puts it, which basically means seeing the world the way Jesus does.

- Throughout the letter Paul emphasizes the need for love and charity in their community and to stand firm and rejoice, no matter their circumstances.
- Being able to do that *requires* a special kind of *selflessness*, and in *today's* passage Paul shows us the *essence* of this in the way Jesus "*emptied* himself."

In fact, if we zoom out and take a *larger* view, what we're seeing is the *nature* of life in the family of *God*.

How so? Well, the Old Testament makes a couple of things crystal clear:

1. God the Father *desperately* wants a *relationship* with us.
2. We're *totally* incapable of living into that relationship on our *own*. =

And so, because the *Son* loves the *Father*, he turns his life into a gift *to* the Father; valuing it *only* insofar as it will *give* the Father what he *so* desperately *wants*.

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Does making his life a *gift* mean that the *Son* is left *empty*? Of course not!

- Because the *Father also* loves the *Son*, *he* gives everything *he* has to *him*.
- He highly exalts the Son, so that *he* would be Lord in heaven, on earth, and under the earth.

And yet, what happens when *all* the knees bow to *Jesus* and all tongues confess *him* as Lord?

- It's *all* to the glory of God *the Father*, because *everything* Jesus *is*, *says*, and *does*, *points* to the Father.
- For example, even when Jesus says, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life," in the very next *breath* he adds, "no one comes to *the Father* except by me."
- Taking on the mind of *Christ* means realizing that our *lives* are not about *us*, and that our life *increases* in the *measure* we give it *away*.

The point of *all* this is to drive home the *reality* that we are not in competition with God for our happiness.

- Uniting our wills to God's doesn't mean resigning ourselves to not getting what we want, but becoming who we were made to be.
- It's the difference between being a fantastic coffee grinder and spending your whole life dissatisfied with the quality of the smoothies you make.

If we're still suspicious, just in this letter it's clear that Paul's life has not been diminished in the least by his giving it away.

- Even though he's in Rome awaiting *execution*, it's *Paul* telling the *Philippians* not to be *upset*, because his *imprisonment* has advanced the *gospel* and encouraged *others*.
- He's ambivalent about living and dying because to *live* is *Jesus* and to *die* is *more Jesus*, and he counts everything *else* as *garbage*.
- *Then* (and *remember*, he's writing from death row), Paul tells them to *rejoice always* and not to have *any* anxiety about *anything*!

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This is *not* a picture of someone that's been *hollowed* out or *ground* down to a *nub* by glorifying *God*.

- This is the result of finding our heart's desire and rejoicing that we can afford it instead of going away sad because it will cost all that we have.

So then, *resist* the temptation to look at *Jesus* and *Paul* and *soften* their message, thinking that *their* example is *way* beyond *you*.

- It *is* way beyond us, but Paul *encourages* us to be confident *anyway* because it's *God* who *started* the good work and it's *God* who will *finish* it.
- Put another way, God is not *interested* in lowering the bar – what he *wants* is for us to *put* ourselves in *his* hands so that *he* can lift us *over* it.

We can *do* that by *turning* our lives into a *gift*, but *don't* be afraid – you *don't* have to do it all at *once*.

- Start developing small, habitual ways of responding to life, like *praying* for the people who *frustrate* or *inconvenience* you,
- or *thanking* God for the things that *keep* you from having your own way.

There are all kinds of things you can do, just get started because the best way to overcome the fear of being left empty is to experience the blessing of having more to give.