

Are You a Victim of Identity Theft?

Revelation 7:9-17. 1 John 3:1-3 & Matthew 5:1-12

Saint Paul's Memorial United Methodist Church

1001 W Colfax Ave, South Bend, Indiana 46616

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Revelation 7:9-17 (NIV)

⁹ After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. ¹⁰ And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." ¹¹ All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, ¹² saying: "Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!"

¹³ Then one of the elders asked me, "These in white robes—who are they, and where did they come from?" ¹⁴ I answered, "Sir, you know." And he said, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. ¹⁵ Therefore, "they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them. ¹⁶ Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. ¹⁷ For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

1 John 3:1-3 (NIV)

¹ How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

² Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. ³ Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.

Matthew 5:1-12 (NIV)

¹ Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, ² and he began to teach them, saying: ³ "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ⁴ Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. ⁵ Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. ⁶ Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. ⁷ Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. ⁸ Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. ⁹ Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. ¹⁰ Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹ Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

Are You a Victim of Identity Theft?

Have you ever been the victim of identity theft? It is a growth industry. A recent study found that 15.4 million people in the United States were the victims of identity theft in 2016, and in the past six years identity thieves have stolen over \$107 billion from people like you and me.

What is identity theft? Identity theft is a serious crime. Identity theft happens when someone uses information about you without your permission. They could use your name, address, credit card or bank account numbers, Social Security number, even medical insurance account numbers to do you harm.

What are the most common types of identity theft? According to the U. S. Department of Justice there are several ways somebody can steal your identity. In public places, for example, criminals may engage in “shoulder surfing” — watching you from a nearby location as you punch in your telephone calling card number or credit card number — or listen in on your conversation if you give your credit-card number over the telephone.

If you receive applications for “pre-approved” credit cards in the mail, but discard them without tearing up the enclosed materials, criminals may retrieve them and try to activate the cards for their own use without your knowledge. Also, if your mail is delivered to a place where others have ready access to it, criminals may simply intercept and redirect your mail to another location.

Many people respond to “spam” — unsolicited E-mail — that promises some benefit, but also requests some identifying data. With this data, a criminal is able to conduct a wide range of crimes. For example: False applications for loans and credit cards, fraudulent withdrawals from bank accounts, fraudulent use of telephone calling cards or online accounts, or obtaining other goods or privileges which the criminal might be denied if he were to use his real name.

Have I succeeded in making you paranoid yet? No need to be, but I hope I’ve helped you be more vigilant. Identity theft is a threat to us all. It could happen to anyone. Of course, you could be a victim of identity theft purely by mistake.

A man named Robert Patton experienced this several years ago. It began one day when he was stopped for a traffic violation. On a routine check, the police officer discovered that his name was listed as being AWOL from the Army. Although he protested his innocence, he was taken to the station house and locked in a cell. Two MPs came and escorted him to the processing center at Fort Dix, N.J. Then he was taken to what they informed him were his barracks, shown his bunk and footlocker, and told to put on his uniform.

Besides having the same name, Robert and the missing GI apparently looked alike. They wore the same size uniform. His fellow soldiers assumed he was the same man. For the next week or so, Robert’s life was a nightmare. His unit was still being processed, and he was required to go along.

About a week later, he was told to report to the office of the Commanding Officer. The captain in charge told him the real AWOL soldier had been caught, but instead of apologizing, the captain treated Robert as if the mix-up was his fault. He told him to be out of the camp in two hours.

Robert was overjoyed. He raced back to the barracks, changed into his civvies and high-tailed it for the exit. Just as the gate opened, he heard a voice calling his name. A private ran up and handed him an envelope that had been forwarded from his old address. When he opened it, he was stunned. It was his long-awaited draft notice.

Sometimes you can't win. Robert's identity wasn't stolen. His discomfort came about by a simple mistake, but it was still a frustrating experience.

Now why am I spending so much time talking about a lost or stolen identity? It is because I believe this is the most tragic thing that can happen to a human being — to lose his or her identity. Our lesson for the day is from 1 John 3: “See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know Him. Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. All who have this hope in Him purify themselves, just as He is pure.”

WHO ARE YOU? IF YOU HAVE MADE CHRIST LORD OF YOUR LIFE, THEN YOU ARE A CHILD OF GOD. AND YOU DARE NEVER FORGET THAT.

I want to tell a story that many of you have heard before. But there are some stories that need to be told again.

It was a story first told years ago by retired seminary professor Fred Craddock while lecturing at Yale University. It's been repeated by many great speakers and preachers. Zig Ziglar used to tell it in many of his motivational rallies. It's that great of a story.

Craddock told of going back one summer to Gatlinburg, Tennessee to take a short vacation with his wife. One night they found a quiet little restaurant where they looked forward to a private meal — just the two of them.

While they were waiting for their meal they noticed a distinguished looking, white-haired man moving from table to table, visiting guests. Craddock whispered to his wife, “I hope he doesn't come over here.” He didn't want the man to intrude on their privacy.

But the man did come by their table. “Where you folks from?” he asked amicably. “Oklahoma,” Craddock replied. “Splendid state, I hear, although I've never been there,” said the white-haired man. “What do you do for a living?” “I teach homiletics at the graduate seminary of Phillips University,” Craddock answered. “Oh, so you teach preachers, do you? Well, I've got a story I want to tell you.”

And with that he pulled up a chair and sat down at the table with Craddock and his wife. Dr. Craddock said he groaned inwardly. Oh no, here comes another preacher story. It seems everyone has one.

The man stuck out his hand. “I’m Ben Hooper. I was born not far from here across the mountains. My mother wasn’t married when I was born so I had a hard time. When I started to school, my classmates had a name for me, and it wasn’t a very nice name. I used to go off by myself at recess and during lunchtime because the taunts of my classmates cut so deeply.

“What was worse was going downtown on Saturday afternoon and feeling every eye burning a hole through me. They were all wondering just who my real father was.

“When I was about 12 years old a new preacher came to our church. I would always go in late and slip out early. But one day the preacher said the benediction so fast I got caught and had to walk out with the crowd. I could feel every eye in church on me. Just about the time I got to the door I felt a big hand on my shoulder. I looked up and the preacher was looking at me.

“Who are you, son? Whose boy are you?” the preacher asked. I felt the old weight come on me. It was like a big, black cloud. Even the preacher was putting me down. But as he looked down at me, studying my face, he began to smile a big smile of recognition. “Wait a minute,” he said, “I know who you are. I see the family resemblance. You are a son of God.”

“With that he slapped me across the rump and said, ‘Boy, you’ve got a great inheritance. Go and claim it.’”

The old man looked across the table at Fred Craddock and said, “That was the most important single sentence ever said to me.” With that he smiled, shook the hands of Craddock and his wife, and moved on to another table to greet old friends.

Suddenly, Fred Craddock remembered. On two occasions the people of Tennessee had elected the son of an unwed mother to be their governor. His name was Ben Hooper.

I know who you are. I see the family resemblance. You are a son or daughter of God. Terrible things happen to people when they forget who they are. Some of them forget their values. Some of them lose their sense of purpose. All of them lose their joy.

Today is All Saints’ Day. We remember those people who have gone before us who sought in their own time to live as children of God. They were not perfect people — though they are made perfect now. Notice how St. John writes, “Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.” Saints of God are not perfect people in this world — though they will be made perfect when they come face to face with Christ. That is the inheritance that we have been promised.

WHY IS THAT TRUE? IT IS FOR ONLY ONE REASON: BECAUSE WE ARE GOD'S CHILDREN.

A very exclusive auction was held several years ago. The money bid for the objects which were auctioned was far higher than you would have paid in an ultra-nice department store. For example, the winning bid for a rocking chair that had been valued between \$3,000 and \$5,000 was \$453,500.00.

This had been the case throughout the duration of the auction. A used automobile valued between \$18,000 and \$22,000 was sold for \$79,500. A set of green tumblers valued at \$500 sold for \$38,000. A necklace valued at \$500 to \$700 went for \$211,500. For four days articles of common, ordinary value were sold for wildly inflated prices. Why? The items auctioned were from the estate of Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis. The value of the items auctioned sold on the basis of the one to whom they had belonged.

Why are you and I valuable? It is because of the One to whom we belong. You and I may appear to be very ordinary to people around us, but God sees us as having ultimate value. Enough value that God gave His Son in our behalf.

Friend, don't let anybody tell you that you don't matter. Don't let anybody rob you of your identity.

“See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!.... Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.”

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