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## HOMECOMING 2010: BEYOND THE BOUNDARIES

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John 20:21: *“Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you.”*

I am pleased to welcome so many of our family and friends today. Today is a day when we celebrate 117 years of the Lord Jesus Christ working through Waverly Hall Baptist Church, and many of you have been a part of that work. There are those in this room today who came to church here as little children; and some of those little children grew up, got married, and raised their own children here. Others of you have roots here, but time and circumstance have removed you from this congregation and placed you into others. Whether you’ve been here for decades continuously, or whether you’ve been grafted into another congregation elsewhere, there is a mark upon your heart—a mark that reads, “Waverly Hall Baptist Church.”

That is part of what we mean by our theme today, “Beyond the Boundaries.” This place has a special place in the hearts of people both near and far. Waverly Hall Baptist Church exists in hearts and minds far removed from this geographical location. Some of you bear witness to the changes in the physical structure over the years. There are a few among us who remember the original sanctuary with its pot belly stove, before this one replaced it in 1955. Others remember the addition of Sunday school rooms and the fellowship hall. Many more of you remember the dedication of the organ twenty five years ago, and the stained glass windows nearly twenty years ago. Yes, these things mark a physical location that, despite the relentless wearing on of time, still stands.

You and I know, though, that these walls, these windows, these pews would hold very little attraction for us if not for the people of Waverly Hall Baptist Church. Our relationship to this location is made special by our relationships with the other people who were and are here—God’s people. For many, those special people included mothers, fathers, husbands, wives, siblings, and other family relations. In your mind’s eye you see them still, singing in the choir, shaking the preacher’s hand, giving a committee report, setting out a casserole for a dinner on the grounds. You see them going about doing quietly the things that made this church a vital organization. You see them carrying on the work of the gospel, giving to missions, helping someone in need, teaching children and making them smile. Yes, this location is special because of our connection to the special people who have walked here among us.

We understand that Waverly Hall Baptist Church is more than a physical location; it is a people, called of God to carry the gospel to a world that is increasingly dark. While the darkness itself seems to be a boundary, it is this very boundary that our church was founded to invade. Jesus said, *“Upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it”* (Matthew 16:18). The “rock” to which Jesus is referring is Peter’s statement that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Therefore, the first boundary Waverly Hall Baptist Church is called to cross is the very hell that captures and ensnares our world. We are to take the gospel message, the message of the Son of God, to a lost world. We are to

assault the very gates of hell itself in order to save the lost. Jude tells us, “*And of some have compassion, making a difference: And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh*” (Jude 22, 23). As you read Jesus’ letters to the seven churches of Asia in Revelation chapters 2 and 3, you will see that the willingness to cross this boundary is foundational to the church’s ongoing mission. When we cease to cross this boundary, when the cries of the lost grow fainter and fainter upon our ears and hearts, we cease to be a church. We become some kind of a social club perhaps, but we cease to be a church. Dear God, let us never forget our mission!

So the primary boundary is the boundary between the church and the world. We must invade the world with Christ’s message, but never let the world invade the church!

The next boundary is the boundary of geography. As we’ve already said this morning, there are those of you who have spent years or decades here and have since gone on to other locations. We praise God for that. For many of you, this place will always be home. Wherever you’ve gone, you’ve taken a little bit of Waverly Hall Baptist Church with you. Our church family has expanded from this one small place to all points of the compass. You’ve been grafted into other congregations; and in those congregations, and in your communities, the subtle influences of Waverly Hall Baptist Church have colored your dealings. I hope and I pray that the nurturing you received here you have passed on to others. You have passed on what you have learned, and in so doing you have passed on the nurture and the nature of Waverly Hall Baptist Church. Who can tell how the ripples of eternity have spread from this place, both directly and indirectly? Dear God, let us be mindful of how our actions in this place echo through eternity, for good or for ill!

Another boundary is the limit of time. This church was founded in 1893 on a little hill outside of town. I was surprised to find that one of our church families still retains the bottle of communion wine from that founding service. To us, that bottle seems very old! But in truth, Waverly Hall Baptist Church was founded in the mind and heart of God long, long before that simple gathering of believers met in 1893. You see, this church was founded in belief in Jesus as the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. We celebrate the story of Jesus’ birth some 2,100 years ago, and we read how He grew up, ministered, and then suffered and died for our sins. Yet even 2,100 years ago cannot touch the depth of time in which Waverly Hall Baptist Church was founded. The book of Revelation calls Jesus “*the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world*” (Rev. 13:8). II Timothy 1:9 informs us, “*Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.*” The foundation of our salvation, of our message, of our very purpose as a church, began in the mind and heart of God before the world was formed. There was no “plan B.” In the deepest and truest sense, Waverly Hall Baptist Church was founded in the depths of eternity.

And yet time constrains us on both sides, past and future, while we roam in the ever-changing present. The past and the future are barriers for us, perhaps, but not for the Almighty. He who planned our salvation in the distant past has promised to keep us now and always. This is especially comforting because many of those who have walked these aisles with us—our friends, our spouses, our mothers and fathers—have passed the boundaries of this earth and are at home with God forever. We feel the sorrow of separation, but not the dread of despair because Jesus Christ crossed this great boundary for us already. He made us this precious promise in John 14:

*1 Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.*

*2 In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.*

*3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.*

Death and the future are not boundaries for us or for our loved ones. Those with whom we have broken bread, who have taught us in Sunday school, who have engaged in quiet ministry here will share with us again over there in heaven. Yes, surely our dear friends from Waverly Hall Baptist Church await us. Dear God, thank You for loving us both in eternity past and in eternity to come!

There was a time, not too long ago, when we could not celebrate a homecoming service, or any other service, within these walls. Even before that, the church's attendance and membership had dwindled to just a handful. You might say that what had been left to fall apart through apathy was savagely torn apart, like a building that is torn apart for its copper wiring. It seemed that the light of Waverly Hall Baptist Church was nearly extinguished. Even now, you can see that the light is faint. The candle flickers. We believe, though, that God still has a purpose for Waverly Hall Baptist Church, and we are committed to be faithful in pursuing that purpose. Today we ask for your prayers as we labor to rebuild what was torn down. A great and wearying part of the labor lies in being patient as we put forth our best efforts and look for results. We need to be mindful of Paul's exhortation in Galatians 6:

*7 Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.*

*8 For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.*

*9 And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.*

Our task is to plant and to nurture, and trust that God knows the "due season" in which we begin to see the fruit of our labor. This is the last boundary, the boundary of exhaustion. Runners call it "the wall." It is the boundary that we must continue to cross, week after week. You can see some of the effort even in today's service. We are pushing forward, trying to do everything with excellence to the best of our ability. It is wearying, but friends, it is worth it!

Will you pray for us? Will you pray that we will continue to press on in patience, doing what we do to the best of our ability and trusting God with the increase? Will you pray the He will continue to prepare our hearts to receive the increase when it comes? I have great faith that God will honor those prayers so that we can continue to go beyond the boundaries, doing the work that God has called us to do.

I close with this one verse, which captures the essence of our mission to go beyond the boundaries:

*John 20:21: "Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you."*