

Explore: The perfect offering

October 16, 2014

- *The Explore the Bible lesson for Nov. 2 focuses on Hebrews 9:11-15.*

On Nov. 18, Lone Star on Preston, the estate of former Dallas Cowboys football star Deion Sanders, will be auctioned off to some lucky (and extremely wealthy) new homeowner.

This 29,000-square-foot home on 9.4 acres features soaring ceilings with large crown moldings throughout the home, including its 10 bedrooms and 10 bathrooms, a regulation-size indoor basketball court, a barber shop, bowling alley, huge media room, arcade with wet bar, indoor and outdoor pools with spas, a full-sized football field, tennis courts, sport courts, a 14-bay garage with two bays sized to fit a yacht or RV, and a breath-taking view that includes the estate's scenic 8-acre lake with central fountain and private dock, resort-style backyard and gardens, and cabana featuring an outdoor kitchen. The pictures inspire awe and make you want to beg for a grand tour. You could get lost in the grandeur.

Intimacy of the Most Holy Place

The tabernacle described by the author of Hebrews 9 has the same effect. He essentially gives a tour of the Holy Place and then pulls back the veil on the mysteries of the Most Holy Place. We are spellbound by glints of gold, by the artifacts laden with meaning, reminders of the grand oral tradition passed down through generations of God's interaction with the people of Israel.

It feels personal, intimate, proof God is more than a distant and impersonal deity, proof God is active and involved in the hearts and lives of his people. But as soon as we are drawn in, the curtain drops abruptly. "We cannot discuss these things in detail now" (9:5). It is not about the place. It is not

about the gold. It is not even about the religious relics of the past.

Then he begins to describe the rituals. The people longed for an experience of God. They longed to shed the sins that separated them from God. And so the priests regularly made gifts and sacrifices intended to clear the conscience of the worshipper. And annually, the priest made atonement for even those sins committed in ignorance—external regulations that were ineffective to obtain eternal redemption and enable the people to freely love and serve God.

Most of us never have experienced an animal sacrifice. We've never been part of a blood offering. But we understand the cost. We feel the pain of the effort, that "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (9:22).

This first covenant is like second nature to us. Rituals are something we can control through our own effort—the daily Bible reading, praying for the sick, reaching out to our neighbors, standing up for the lonely kid at school. We serve on church committees, and we volunteer in the youth group or children's ministry. We serve the poor in soup kitchens and care for orphans around the world. Time and again, we make these offerings. But they cannot usher us into the Most Holy Place. These actions won't satisfy our sin and put us right with God.

The new order

But now the Holy Spirit has revealed the new order that Jesus Christ came to bring. The Preacher heralds good news: Christ entered a more perfect tabernacle. He was high priest of a genuinely effective offering. He himself provided an unblemished sacrifice whose blood obtained eternal redemption.

If the blood of goats and calves, the goodwill offerings that we bring, can make us outwardly clean, Jesus' blood can purify our inner lives as well. Jesus' sacrifice can cleanse our consciences once and for all, so we may

worship and serve the living God. Now God's laws are in our hearts. Now our sins have been wiped from God's memory. Now, by one sacrifice, Christ has made perfect forever those who are being made holy (10:14).

Now we can live forgiven. Our spiritual disciplines cease to be ritual offerings and instead become portals for the Holy Spirit to usher us into the presence of God. Our committee service and acts of charity no longer feel like sacrifice but an overflow of the life and love of God that pours through us. The gleam of the tabernacle is overshadowed by the bright hope of Christ's return (9:28).

The ministry of our Great High Priest has ushered us into the Most Holy Place, has granted us intimacy with the living God, and has guaranteed our promised eternal inheritance.