

**“Where is the lamb for the burnt offering?”** That’s what Isaac asked his father, Abraham, as the two of them headed for Mount Moriah to offer a sacrifice to the Lord. **“The fire and wood are here,”** Isaac observed, **“but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?”** With unwavering faith, Abraham assured his son, **“God himself will provide the lamb.”** And so it was; the Lord did indeed provide a ram that was offered to God in Isaac’s place (Ge 22). Isaac’s question was asked and answered 2,000 years before the writer of Hebrews penned his inspired word of encouragement to a group of wavering Jewish believers, but the writer knew it would still be on the minds of his readers.

The worship of Israel for 1,500 years had revolved around the sacrifices that were offered at the altar of burnt offering, first in front of the tabernacle, and later in front of the temple. The author has gone to great lengths to convince his Jewish readers that, in Jesus, they have something better than anything Judaism had to offer. In Jesus they had a better High Priest—a Great High Priest, a perfect and a compassionate High Priest who could sympathize with them in their weakness. But where was the lamb for the offering?

If Jesus was truly the Great High Priest, he needed something to offer to God to atone for sin. Where was the lamb? That is the message of our reading today. We see Jesus once again as the Great High Priest—great because **he is a self-sacrificing High Priest**. Jesus is himself an acceptable sacrifice, and his was an accepted sacrifice.

<sup>5</sup> **Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: “Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; <sup>6</sup> with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased.** It jumps out at you a little bit when you read that God did not desire sacrifice and offering and that God was not pleased with burnt and sin offerings. We all know that there were a lot of sacrifices in Israel. God required sacrifices, but these offerings were never to be an end in themselves. The multitude of sacrifices was to be a regular proclamation of the people’s sin and the grace of God.

Each time the priests killed a lamb or goat or bull or ram, the message was proclaimed vividly: **“The wages of sin is death”** (Ro 6:23). At the same time, God’s grace was also revealed by the fact that sinful people were spared by the death of a substitute. And above all, those many animal sacrifices were designed to point ahead to the perfect substitute whom God would send into the world, who would bear the sins of the world and give himself as an offering to God to atone for all sins.

It was only in connection with the coming Savior that the many Old Testament offerings had any value. The writer says in the verse preceding our text, **“It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins”** (Heb 10:4). And earlier, our writer asked a good question: **“If those sacrifices could have actually taken away sins, wouldn’t they have stopped being offered?”** (see Heb 10:2).

God says, **“The one who sins is the one who will die”** (Eze 18:4,20). How foolish to think that the death of an animal could cover one’s sins. But eventually, many people in Israel failed to see their own sinfulness and failed to look ahead with faith to the Lamb that God would send into the world to suffer and die and spare them from the death they deserved.

Pretty soon, the Jews began to think of their offerings as meritorious in themselves. They came to think that, by bringing an animal for sacrifice, they were doing a good work that would cause God to be pleased with them and look on them with favor. And so their sacrifices were worthless in God’s sight—indeed, they were an abomination to him—brought as bribes to buy his mercy and forgiveness. That’s what it means when our Lord says to God the Father, **“Sacrifice and offering you did not desire.”**

And this is a message that we still need to hear today. God does not desire our sacrifices and is not pleased with our offerings when they are brought, as the Israelites did, with the thought of paying for our sins. Sacrifices and offerings still cannot buy God’s forgiveness nor bring peace to the troubled heart.

For us to ever think that we can pay for our sins simply by being sorry for them—or by offering God an hour of worship or by bringing an offering of money or anything else we might do—is to forget that God has said, **“The wages of sin is death”** (Ro 6:23). The only way we could ever pay for our sins is by spending eternity in the torments of hell—that alone would square our account with a holy God.

It was for this very reason—because our sacrifices were not pleasing to God—that he provided his own lamb for sacrifice. Listen as Jesus says, **“A body you prepared for me.”** When Christ says that his heavenly Father prepared a body for him, he is talking about the miracle of the incarnation. This is the mystery that John describes when he says, **“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us”** (Jn 1:14).

God the Father prepared a body for his Son so that his Son might have blood to shed for us on a shameful cross, blood that can do what the blood of beasts and good works and gold and silver never could do, blood that can purify us and every sinner from every sin because it is the holy precious blood of God’s one and only Son. God gave his Son a body

so that, by his blood, he could wash away our sins. He says, ***“Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me”***—a body that our Great High Priest would offer as the one great sacrifice for sin. But was Jesus an acceptable sacrifice?

Each of the blood sacrifices in the Old Testament began the same way—with the worshiper presenting the animal for his sacrifice to the priest for examination by the priest. The rite of sacrifice in Israel began with the presentation of the animal for sacrifice to the priest on duty. The priest would inspect the animal for defects and reject any animals that failed to meet the requirement of physical perfection.

A great King like the Lord deserved the best and demanded that only unblemished animals be offered to him. But even the best unblemished animals offered on Israel’s altars could not truly take away sin—that’s why God prepared a body for his Son—and now Christ says: ***“Here I am . . . I have come to do your will.”***

Here, the Great High Priest presents himself to God as the Lamb of God who came to take away the sin of the world. The Father had prepared a body for his Son, and now the Son, assuming our human nature, declares his willingness to carry out the mission of mercy his Father had set before him. Though the Savior’s resolve to fully complete the will of his heavenly Father was put to the test throughout his ministry—from the temptation in the wilderness to the Garden of Gethsemane—Jesus remained faithful to his heavenly Father. Jesus was unflawed by any sin. After inspection through his all-seeing eye, the Father declared Jesus to be his Son, ***“in whom [he is] well pleased.”***

Indeed, the inspection of God’s Lamb was continued during his trials before Annas and Caiaphas and Pontius Pilate. Pilate openly declared that he had examined Jesus and ***“found no basis for [the Jews’] charges against him”*** (Lk 23:14). Inspected by God in heaven and in courtrooms on earth, Jesus was proved to be the Lamb of God, pure and holy. And so God’s Son, who assumed the body his Father had prepared for him, declared when he came into the world, ***“I have come to do your will, my God.”***

Knowing full well that the road that began at the manger would end in a grave, God’s Son came to carry out his Father’s will to complete the gracious plan of salvation. Even though the prospect of it troubled our Savior’s sinless heart, he declared near the end of his earthly ministry that for this very reason, he ***“was born and came into the world”*** (Jn 18:37). He had come to do his Father’s will and nothing would stop him from completing that work. He went from the manger to the cross, and there he cried out, ***“It is finished”*** (Jn 19:30). Jesus our Great High Priest was an acceptable sacrifice—a lamb without a single blemish or defect of sin—as St. Peter says (1 Pe 1:18,19), and his was an accepted sacrifice.

Our writer has an interesting way of making the point that Christ’s sacrifice was an accepted sacrifice when he compares the work of Jesus to the priests of Israel. He says, ***“Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices. . . . But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God.”*** The Old Testament priests were never finished. The sacrifices they offered were ***“repeated endlessly year after year”*** (Heb 10:1) because the blood of beasts could never cleanse the guilty soul of sin. So they stood there at the altar and performed their religious duties for centuries.

Then came Jesus the Great High Priest and offered himself once for all for the sins of the world. And then, ***“He sat down at the right hand of God.”*** When Jesus bowed his head and died, his redeeming work was done—he could look from the beginning of the world to its end and see not one sinner left to be saved, not one sin left to be paid for. By his resurrection and exaltation to the right hand of the Father, God has assured all people that his Jesus was both Lord and Christ—God’s Son and the world’s Savior—and his work was finished completely. Christ’s self-sacrifice was accepted by God as full payment for the sins of the world.

Jesus our Great High Priest offered himself for the sins of the world, and his sacrifice was accepted by God! He sat down at the right hand of God—no further price is demanded, no more sacrifice required. Forgiveness is purchased and salvation is free. Believe. Rejoice. Live at peace here through Jesus until you live with him in his perfect peace forever.

Yes, Jesus is our Great High Priest who offers the greatest sacrifice—himself. He is himself the victim and our priest. May we by faith lay our hands on the head of God’s faultless Lamb and believe Christ has paid for our sins with his precious blood forever. Amen.