

MATTHEW 25 & THE LAST JUDGMENT BY [Dr. Marcellino D'Ambrosio](#)

Only one passage in the Gospels provides a sneak preview of that day of reckoning—Matthew 25:31-46. First of all, note that most of Jesus' parables have a jarring punch line. They tend to upset the preconceived notions of just about everyone, especially the most religious, whether they be Pharisees or disciples.

Clearly, all of us expect that the Judge will condemn evil and impose sentence on the guilty. And we tend to think of evildoing as stepping over the line and infringing on the rights of others, taking their possessions, maybe even taking their lives. The language of the Our Father lends itself to this interpretation of sin when it says “forgive us our trespasses.”

The problem with this understanding of sin is that it is incomplete, even shallow. Lots of people think that as long as they don't lie, cheat, and steal, but just keep to themselves and mind their own business, they deserve big rewards from God.

The story of the Last Judgment addresses these “decent folks.” Imagine their shock as they swagger smugly up to the judge's bench expecting praise only to be sent off to eternal punishment!

CONDEMNED FOR SINS OF OMISSION

Why? Because they neglected to do the good that God required them to do. They did not “commit” offenses or infractions of the law; they did nothing positively destructive. No, but in the presence of suffering, they just heartlessly did nothing. Their sin was not a sin of “commission” but a sin of “omission.”

But note—these sins of omission are the very thing that ultimately seals the fate of the damned. There are lots of negative commandments, often expressed as “thou shalt not's.” But the two most important commandments are positive “thou shalt's.” “You shall love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, soul, and strength and you shall love thy neighbour as yourself.”

THE TWO GREATEST COMMANDMENTS

These two commandments require an interior disposition that issues in outward actions. If you are hungry, you love yourself enough to go to the fridge. If you truly love your hungry neighbour as yourself, you don't just say a prayer and offer sympathy (James 2:15-17). Loving God with all your heart doesn't mean giving a respectful nod to God and then going on your merry way. It means going *out* of your way, passionately seeking to love him and serve him in all that you do.

In this Last Judgment scene we see how these two commandments, these two loves, are really one. Jesus makes clear that loving God with your whole heart is expressed in loving your neighbour as yourself. And whenever you love your neighbour in this way, you are actually loving the Son of God. So ultimately, the judgment is simple. It all comes down to love. The judge happens to be the King of hearts.