

A large, stylized graphic of a tree with a cityscape visible through its branches. The word "GENESIS" is at the top left, "REVELATION" is at the bottom right, and "BOOKENDS" is written vertically down the center of the tree trunk.

GENESIS

# BOOKENDS

REVELATION

## LETTER TO A PERSECUTED CHURCH

*REVELATION 2:8-11*

### SYNOPSIS

In Revelation 2:8-11, Jesus writes his second letter to the churches in Asia Minor as he writes to Smyrna. This church was mired by persecution and was struggling. Instead of focusing the letter on correction for the church, Jesus writes with encouragement. Though they faced poverty, slander, imprisonment, and even death, Jesus assures them that He knows their affliction and calls them spiritually rich. Their lack of material security does not mean spiritual failure; instead, their faithfulness stores up eternal treasure. Jesus reveals that He is greater than the pain and struggles the church was facing.

### SERMON OUTLINE

1. **The Difficulties the church was facing.** The church in Smyrna was bombarded on every side with difficulties. Poverty, blasphemy, suffering, imprisonment, and death were all experiences that the church was facing or about to face. Through these difficulties, Smyrna showed unbelievable resolve to remain steadfast despite everything they faced. Do we face similar difficulties today? What is our response to this in times of struggle?
2. **Jesus' Response and Victory** Jesus lovingly comforts his church and encourages them. He shows the church in Smyrna that they are spiritually rich because they have the "one who died and came to life" as the one who has paved a way for them. They are storing up for themselves wealth that is not of this world, but of heaven. They do this by continually investing in God and in their relationship with others. Is our lives marked by the richness of this world or of the one to come? How are we investing our time and energy?
3. **Our Response** With Jesus by our side, we are able to face any difficulties that may come up. We do this by:

- a. **Not Fearing** Jesus gives us purpose in our pain and suffering, helping us understand that this testing enables us to grow and strengthen our faith. This growth is not by our own doing, but by God working through us.
- b. **Faithfully Enduring** We continue to remain faithful even in the face of the trial we have knowing that God has promised us a crown of life.

## SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### LOOKING AT THE TEXT

1. In what ways is the letter to Smyrna different from the letter of Ephesus? In what ways are they the same?
2. Why do you think Jesus introduces himself like he does?
3. What does it look like to be rich in the way that Jesus describes? What evidence do we see in a person's life that would indicate that they are spiritually rich?
4. Who are those who say they are Jews but are not? What behavior is the reason to call them a synagogue of Satan?
5. What promises are given to those who "are faithful unto death," and how do these promises shape the church's perspective on persecution? (See also John 11:25-26; Romans 8:18; James 1:12; and 2nd Timothy 4:7-8)

### GROUP REFLECTION & APPLICATION

6. Are there ways you feel like persecution is taking place in your life?  
If not, why do you think persecution is absent?
7. Where do you most feel "poor" or lacking right now—financially, relationally, emotionally—and how might Jesus be redefining what true wealth is?
8. What fears keep you from faithfulness or obedience? How does Christ's victory over death address those fears?
9. Practically, what does "storing up treasure in heaven" look like in your schedule, spending, and priorities this week?
10. If faithfulness cost you comfort, reputation, or security, what would help you endure rather than retreat?