New Year's Eve 2008
Ecclesiastes 3:1-15
Hebrews 13:8

Goal: that the hearers would realize anew how transitory everything is except for God's love for us in Jesus Christ, and that they would respect, love, and trust in Him above all else in the New Year.

*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Hebrews 13:8 (NIV)*

**Introduction**

Once upon a time there was a king who was very troubled at heart. He had many kingly worries. He worried about how to govern well, how to stimulate the economy, how to keep the peace with neighboring countries. He worried about whether people were plotting against him. Have you noticed, here in the United States, how our presidents seem to age prematurely during the time they are in office? The burdens of leadership are heavy, and this king felt weighed down.

At the same time, the king felt many kingly temptations as well, for example, the temptation to abuse his power, or to be greedy, or to be corrupt, or to be a glutton, or to order things so that his every whim was catered to. Have you noticed how even honest people, even sometimes leaders in the church, when they become wealthy or famous or powerful, sometimes stumble and fall? The temptations of leadership are strong, and this king felt them keenly.

The king was so troubled that he called together all the wise men and philosophers and theologians of his kingdom and he asked them for help. "Give me some words," said the king, "Some wise words that will help me with the pressures of being a king. Some words that will comfort me when things go badly and that will help me resist temptation when things go well. And keep it simple! I don't want to have to wade through a thick book of philosophical mumbo-jumbo. I just want a few wise words, something I can easily remember."

So all the wise men of the kingdom got together and debated, and they came up with a short phrase that fit every possible situation. A phrase that applies to good times and bad times. A phrase so short, it could be inscribed on a golden ring so that the king could wear it always and look at it any time and remember. Four simple words: This too shall pass.

# Everything Good Will Pass Away

Some of you have probably heard this story before. But it is well to hear it again tonight, on the eve of the New Year. This is the message of Ecclesiastes: there is a time for everything, and everything has its time, and then it's gone! "This too shall pass."

This could be our motto as we leave the old year behind and enter 2009. “This too shall pass.” As we enter the New Year, we should keep in mind first of all that everything good will eventually pass away. For example, for some of us, our health is the most important thing that we have. After all, if you don't have your health, you don't have anything. And certainly, if we have good health, we ought to give thanks to God and to take care of our health. But this too shall pass. Sooner or later our strength fades and our health deteriorates.

Again, for many of us, our family is the source of our happiness. What a blessing it is then there is love and peace in our home! We would sacrifice anything for the good of our family. But again, this too shall pass. You know what happens in time to our families. The daughter grows up and gets married and moves away. The son takes a job in another state. Later the husband or the wife gets ill or passes away to be with the Lord, and one is left to carry on without family around. And all this assumes that nothing else -- like divorce -- happens to destroy the unity of the family. What Ecclesiastes says is true. There is a time to embrace (as family members do) and a time to refrain. Everything has its time, and then it's over.

It is the same with every good thing in life. Money comes and money goes. The stock market goes up and the stock market goes down. We may have success at work, but sooner or later we change jobs or lose our job or retire, and it’s over. We may have good grades at school, but sooner or later we graduate and leave school. We may win a prize, but all too soon the trophy or the ribbon gathers dust on the shelf. Everything has its time, and then it’s over.

As we think about this past year, it is good to remember all the blessings that God gave you. Everything good comes from God, and we cannot do otherwise than thank Him for it. But at the same time, we should remember that these blessings are ours only for a time. They all have their time, and they are good! But 2008 is over. All too easily we get wrapped up in things that are only temporary. This too shall pass!

**Everything Bad Will Pass Away**

So, everything good will eventually pass away. But at the same time, everything bad will also pass away! You know how it is when you're sick and you can't get to sleep. You toss and turn, and you look at the clock and only five minutes passed since the last time you looked. It seems like the pain will never end. It seems like the night will never end! But it does. This too shall pass. Ecclesiastes says that there is also a time to heal (v. 3).

[Insert story of a time where something bad happened, but it soon passed away]

Every problem that we have, every trial, every hurt, every anxiety, will pass away sooner or later. Ecclesiastes says that there is a time to weep, but also a time to laugh. There is a time to mourn, but also a time to dance. In fact, most of our hurts are healed right here in this life. God sometimes allows us to pass through fiery trials, yet he also often gives us times of rest. On the other hand, some of our hurts will not be healed until our time in this world is over. God says that a day is coming when he will wipe away every tear from our eyes, when there will be no more suffering, when death itself will be eliminated. All these bad things – they too shall pass.

As we go into the New Year, we should remember the bad times that we have overcome with God by our side. 2008 is over in this sense also. When we are hurting, it seems like the pain will last forever. But this too shall pass!

# Jesus' Love Will Never Pass Away

Good things will pass away. Bad things will pass away. But there is one thing which will never pass away! Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever (Hebrews 13:8). For us, the years bring many changes, but for God, a thousand years is like a day, and a day like a thousand years. Jesus loves us today with the same love that he showed us 2000 years ago. Jesus loves us so much that he was willing to leave heaven behind and be born into this world with all its suffering and pain and strife. Jesus loves us so much that he was willing to die a horrible death on the cross in order to erase our moral failures and wrongdoings. Jesus loves us so much that just as he rose from the dead, he will raise us up too, to live forever with him.

Jesus says, "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5, Joshua 1:5). He says, "Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). It is true, as Ecclesiastes says, there is a time to be born and a time to die (v. 2). But it is also true, as Romans 8 says, "Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons nor any powers, neither the present (2008) nor the future (2009), neither height nor depth nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:38-39) No matter what happens, Jesus loves me. If I live, I know that Jesus is by my side in good times and bad times. If I die, I go to be with Jesus to wait for the day of resurrection.

We all go through good times and bad times. There is a time for everything. But Jesus' love remains the same forever.

So often we lose sight of this simple truth. Our hearts are often far from God, wrapped up in the past and the future, worried about good things and bad things that are only temporary. This is why we so often slip up and do or say or think things that are not in accord with God's love! We take our eyes off God's constant love and look to things that are transitory. In 2008, our love failed many times. But as we go into the new year, we turn to him whose love always remains constant. Jesus forgives us! 2008 is over also in this sense. Our sins, that is, our moral shortcomings, have also passed away! Because Jesus' love never passes away.

# Conclusion

In conclusion, whatever happened in your life last year, it has passed. [Insert year date] is practically history. In this next year, in [Insert next year date], if things get hectic, frantic, desperately busy, just remember: this too shall pass. If things go well and you are tempted to worship in the temple of the almighty dollar, or the temple of anything else except God, just remember: this too shall pass. If you must pass through hard times of hurt or pain, remember: this too shall pass. Everything will pass away. But Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. In the New Year, dump your failings at the feet of the one who never fails, for he will forgive you. He will be with you. He will bring you home. Because His love will never pass away. Amen.