

**Ecclesiastes 3: 5b; “A Time for Embracing”, Sermon # 14 in the series –  
“Remember Your Creator”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall,  
on July 31<sup>st</sup>, 2016, in the Afternoon Worship Service.**

To embrace is to bring someone close to yourself, and to hold them close to yourself for a very specific purpose and reason. It may be for a moment; it may be for a lifetime. But something very real and definite is being conveyed in an embrace, and we ought to be able to understand, when we are embracing someone, what is happening. And, we ought to be able to understand what it means when someone is embracing us. Sometimes we do; and sometimes we don't. Our verse says that there is a time for embracing, and also that there is a time to refrain from embracing. There are reasons for embracing and there are reasons to refrain from it, and so every Christian should know and have that holy sense about them to know what is the right time and the right place for both. So this is what we want to briefly examine here together this afternoon. We will look 1<sup>st</sup> – At the time for embracing. And then 2<sup>nd</sup> – We will follow that up with looking at when it is not the time for embracing. And then 3<sup>rd</sup>, we will draw a few conclusions.

**1<sup>st</sup> of all – There is a time for embracing.**

To begin with, let's think about the cordial embrace. The cordial embrace is a form of greeting someone we know, or perhaps someone we have never met, by drawing near to them physically for a moment, shaking hands with them, putting our arm around their shoulders, or hugging them, perhaps bringing the sides of our faces together, or sometimes even giving them a holy kiss. There is a time and a place for this. We must acknowledge that there is some amount of difference between cultures in regard to what is appropriate or inappropriate, but that all cultures and societies have some form of either cordial or respectful greeting. In the Middle-Eastern and some European societies it is not at all unusual to see grown men greeting each other with a kiss on the cheek, or both cheeks. This has not been a form of greeting that has grown up in our society as either desirable or appropriate, usually, unless it is among relatives. In Far Eastern societies and cultures, the people often bow to one another for their respectful greeting. We should understand that there is a wide variety of forms of expression, and we should learn to respect that society's cultural norms, when we are in it, if those customs do not violate the teaching of the Bible.

In the Church of Jesus Christ, in our own society, we find that the saints will smile and engage either in a hearty handshake, or a holy hug of embrace. This is what usually takes place. But we need to understand that in the time of the Early Church that it was a bit more personal. Turn with me over to Romans Chapter 16 for a moment. We find here in this chapter that Paul's great desire, in writing his letter to the church at Rome, was to make a special effort at greeting every one of them; and even to relate some of the things that he remembered about them, and their service for Christ, or to him. Verse 3 says, “Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles.” “Likewise greet the church that is in their house.” “Greet my beloved Epanenetus, who is the firstfruits of Achaia to Christ.” “Greet Mary, who labored much for us.” “Greet Andronicus and Junia, my countrymen and my fellow prisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me.” “Greet Amplias, my beloved in the Lord.” “Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and Stachys, my beloved.” The list of these greetings goes on to include many more brethren all the way down to verse 16.

Why did Paul spend so much time writing these greetings and naming so many of the brethren by name? It was because Paul, as he thought of these dear believers that he had met and known in the past, had a fond affection for them. Some had risked their lives for him, some

had been imprisoned. Some had worked hard to help him. Some worked and labored much for the Lord and for the church. But Paul had a deep and abiding affection and love for these brethren and he wanted to express that affection in words. Let me ask you if this is the way that you think about the brethren in our local church here? And is this the way that you think about other believers in our sister churches; in our movement of churches? These verses show us that Paul was eager and zealous to promote the love of the brethren; their brotherly kindness to each other. He was eager for them to display this holy affection to one another as they greeted one another, when they came together to meet as church.

Verse 16 says, "Greet one another with a holy kiss." "The churches of Christ greet you." There is a time for this. The time for holy embracing and kissing is when we are greeting the brethren or when we are leaving them. We show our care and concern for them. We show them our Christian brotherly love. We should be able to do this with both; our relatives after the flesh, and our relatives who are our brothers and sisters in the Christian faith, in a holy and sincere way. You see an example of this over in Acts Chapter 20. In chapter 19, Paul and the disciples with him there found themselves being persecuted by a man named Demetrius; a silversmith, who aroused others of his trade, and a great mob of people who believed in the false goddess Diana, to start an uproar, in order to harm them. They did not succeed. But look at Paul's reaction afterwards. "After the uproar had ceased, Paul called the disciples to himself, embraced them, and departed to go to Macedonia." We need to understand that our affection for the brethren and others, close to us in our lives, will be tested. And it will be proved to be what it really is; not what it appears to be. There is a time for this.

Turn with me over to Genesis chapter 29, verse 10. It says here: "And it came to pass, when Jacob saw Rachel the daughter of Laban his mother's brother, and the sheep of Laban his mother's brother, that Jacob went near and rolled the stone from the well's mouth, and watered the flock of Laban his mother's brother." "Then Jacob kissed Rachel, and lifted up his voice and wept." "And Jacob told Rachel that he was her father's relative and that he was Rebekah's son." "So she ran and told her father." "Then it came to pass, when Laban heard the report about Jacob his sister's son, that he ran to meet him and embraced him and kissed him, and brought him to his house." "So he told Laban all these things." "And Laban said, 'Surely you are my bone and my flesh.'" Here we find that Jacob has left his father's household to go and live with his uncle Laban. He had been sent away by his mother and father because of his having deceived his brother out of his birthright and his blessing. Esau was angry enough that he wanted to kill Jacob over these incidents. There was no love between them at this point in time. It was not a time for embracing between them.

But there were some good things coming to Jacob, now, because of God's having revealed Himself to Him at Bethel on the way over. This is where Jacob was converted, and so now God was going with him on his journey. This is what God does for every true son or daughter of His, even if they have made some sinful mistakes in the past. He will teach them what they need to learn. Listen to how Jacob is greeted when he arrives in Haran. This was a very wonderful beginning to a new life. And the happiness that Jacob's arrival brought to all is very evident. It was, indeed, a time for embracing. It was the right time for these holy displays of affection over the Lord's goodness to them. But Jacob did not know what his uncle Laban was like. He didn't know that Laban was planning and scheming to use Jacob's labor, keeping him at low wages. He was hopeful that he would marry not only one of his daughters but both of his daughters.

### **2<sup>nd</sup> – Let's think about when it is not a time for embracing.**

Sometimes we do not understand, because of our past sins, what God must needs ordain for our present life in order that we will embrace Him and His purpose for our lives that we be holy, even as He is holy. You would think that for Jacob, that now that he has had such a good beginning, such displays of affection and brotherly kindness being shown to him, that everything would go just fine for him. However listen to Genesis 29: 15: "Then Laban said to Jacob,

‘Because you are my relative, should you therefore serve me for nothing?’ “Tell me, what should your wages be?” “Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the elder was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel.” “Leah’s eyes were delicate, but Rachel was beautiful of form and appearance.” “And Laban said, ‘It is better that I give her to you than that I should give her to another man.’ “Stay with me.” “So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed only a few days to him because of the love that he had for her.” You probably remember the rest of the story. When the seven years were finished, then Jacob came to Laban and asked for Rachel to be given to him, and Laban, after having given a feast for all the men of the place, he gave Leah to Jacob that night instead of Rachel. It was probably because it was so dark that night that Jacob was deceived in this embrace of the one who he thought was his wife. And, Leah was probably veiled a good deal of the time. There is a time for embracing, and that is when love and sincerity are at work in your heart and the heart of the one whom you are embracing, and then there is a time not to embrace; when you find out that you have been deceived by the one that you have embraced. I have no doubt that the Lord not only permitted this for Jacob, but He ordained that it be so, in light of his deception of Esau his brother, in the years before.

### **3<sup>rd</sup> – Let’s draw some conclusions from this.**

I find it very interesting to notice how Jacob came to terms with his own deceptive heart; and how he was able to come to understand the Lord’s will in this matter of embracing. His uncle Laban had deceived him 10 times in the wages that he paid to him, in the 20 years that he worked for him. Jacob worked 7 years for Leah, 7 for Rachel, and then six more years for Laban. But God did not permit Laban to hurt him during that time. Jacob devised a means of breeding the flocks so that he ended up with more of the livestock of Laban’s herds, belonging to him, than belonging to Laban. And because of this, because Laban saw that he couldn’t deceive Jacob any longer it says in Genesis 31: 2 it says: “And Jacob saw that the countenance of Laban, and indeed it was not favorable toward him as before.” It was not a time to embrace. It was a time to leave. Whenever a deceiver is found out, it will not be a time for embracing. But Jacob had also learned about the deception of his own heart in this process, and this was what the Lord had intended so that He could bless him. It says in verse 3: “Then the Lord said to Jacob, ‘Return to the land of your fathers and to your family, and I will be with you.’” So, in verse 20 it says, “And Jacob stole away, unknown to Laban the Syrian, in that he did not tell him that he intended to flee.”

But Laban found out about this a short time later, and he pursued Jacob and caught up with him; and again, it was not a time for embracing until Laban could understand that Jacob would take care of his daughters and not afflict them or take other wives to himself. It was only then that they could gather a heap of stones together, and Laban could say in verse 51: “Here is this heap and here is this pillar which I have placed between you and me.” “This heap is a witness, and this pillar is a witness, that I will not pass beyond this heap to you, and you will not pass beyond this heap and this pillar to me, for harm.” “The God of Abraham, the God of Nahor, and the God of their father judge between us.” “And Jacob swore by the Fear of his father Isaac.” “Then Jacob offered a sacrifice on the mountain and called his brethren to eat bread.” “And they ate bread and stayed all night on the mountain.” “And early in the morning Laban arose, and kissed his sons and daughters and blessed them.” This was the time for embracing. Would he ever see them again? Probably not.

Jacob had to come to realize, as you and I need to come to realize, that there was someone else who had been embracing him all these years so that he would learn the lessons of his own sin, and God’s forgiveness of his own deception and God’s sincerity. In coming back to his own family and the land of his relatives he had to go through the territory of Mt. Seir where Esau dwelt. God had arranged all these things very well indeed. Turn with me over to Genesis 32: 1. “So Jacob went on his way and the angels of God met him.” “When Jacob saw them he said, ‘This is God’s camp.’” “And he called the name of that place Mahanaim.” He sent messengers to

Esau to tell him that he wanted to pass on through his territory in peace and find favor in his sight. But the messengers came back saying, in verse 6: “We came to your brother Esau, and he also in coming to meet you, and four hundred men are with him.” “So Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed; and he divided the people that were with him, and flocks and herds and camels, into two companies.” And he prayed in verse 9 – “O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, the Lord who said to me, ‘Return to your country and to your family, and I will deal well with you’: “I am not worthy of the least of Your mercies and of all the truth which You have shown Your servant; for I crossed over this Jordan with my staff, and now I have become two companies.” “Deliver me, I pray from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau; for I fear him, lest he come and attack me and the mother with the children.”

How did God answer him? We find it in verse 22. “And he arose that night and took his two wives, his two female servants and his eleven sons, and crossed over the ford of Jabbok.” “He took them, sent them over the brook, and sent over what he had.” “Then Jacob was left alone; and a Man wrestled with him until the breaking of day.” “Now when He saw that He did not prevail against him, He touched the socket of his hip; and the socket of Jacob’s hip was out of joint as He wrestled with him.” “And He said, ‘Let me go, for the day breaks.” “But he said, ‘I will not let you go unless you bless me!’” You see, this was the time for embracing. It was God, the pre-incarnate Lord Jesus Christ, who Jacob embraced that awful night. And it was not the time to let Him go. There is a time for praying. It is when we are most afraid. And it is time to hold fast that embrace until you are able to find the blessing of Christ’s help to you. This is the greatest lesson of embracing. Have you embraced Christ by faith? Do you realize that it is God who has ordered all of your greatest and most difficult circumstance so that you might come to repentance, and that you might be delivered from your greatest fears of men? Yes, it is so. Verse 27 says: “So He said to him, ‘What is your name?’” “He said, ‘Jacob’.” “And He said, “Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed.” I would say that he prevailed because Christ allowed him to prevail. He prevailed because he seeking the greatest blessings in Christ.

And because of this, when Esau got there with his four hundred armed men, and Jacob crossed over before them and bowed himself to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother; instead of killing Jacob, it says in verse 4 of chapter 33: “But Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept.” This was the time to embrace. I hope that you, too, will learn to embrace Christ by faith, embrace Christ by prayer, and cling to Him until He blesses you, so that every lesson related to your becoming holy is made a reality in your life. If you embrace Christ in this way, then you will find the words of Song of Solomon 8: 3 are true. “His left hand is under my head, and his right hand embraces me.”