The Good Work - Part 1

# When You’ve Just Got to Do Something

## (Nehemiah 2:17-18)

Thank you so much for joining us today. We are beginning a brand-new message series called "The Good Work" and I want to speak to those of you who believe that you were created for something more. This message is for those of you who have this gut feeling that you were born for a purpose. I want to address those of you who are looking for meaning in life and want to do something that matters. And my goal in this series is to lead you to make a commitment to “The Good Work” that God has prepared for everyone who has put their trust in his Son Jesus Christ.

If you have your Bible with you today, would you turn to the Old Testament book of Nehemiah? It’s not an easy one to find, it’s a small book after first and second Chronicles, tucked in between Ezra and Esther. And as you’re finding your place, I want to give you a little bit of context, because we’re not going to study this book in depth, but I am going to use it as the backdrop or the theme behind this series.

Now, the Israelites had been exiled by the Babylonians, in other words, they had been taken captive, taken out of their land, and after 70 years in exile in a foreign land they were finally allowed to return home. After all of this time they were finally able to worship God in their own land, in the place that God had designated, and so they began rebuilding the temple.

Meanwhile, this man Nehemiah had remained in Persia because life for him had been pretty good. He had settled down and he had this gravy job as cupbearer to King Artaxerxes. In other words, he had the job of tasting the wine in the king’s cup before he drank from it just in case somebody was trying to poison the king. And so, if you like wine this would be an awesome job, serving the king in the palace and all the benefits that came with that except for the one slight possibility that you could die, but other than that it was a great job.

Anyway, Nehemiah was serving king Artaxerxes in Persia when word reached him that the temple in Jerusalem was being reconstructed. He became very concerned because they also told him that the walls of Jerusalem lay in ruins and the gates had been burned with fire. And so, his brothers were in great danger because a city without walls meant they were completely exposed to their enemies. And even though many believed these immense walls could never be rebuilt, Nehemiah believed they could. And so, he prayed, making himself available for God to use him to rebuild the wall and God raised him up, transforming a glorified butler into an extraordinary leader.

After spending a significant amount of time in prayer, Nehemiah developed a plan. However, the burden in his heart and the distress that he felt about the situation with his people in Jerusalem soon became apparent to King Artaxerxes. In chapter 2, as Nehemiah was serving the king he asked,

“Why does your face look so sad when you are not ill? This can be nothing but sadness of heart” (Nehemiah 2:2).

Nehemiah told him that he was distraught over the city of his ancestors and seizing the opportunity he prayed and was emboldened to ask the king to send him back to Jerusalem to rebuild its walls. The grace of God was with Nehemiah and the king granted him his request. God sovereignly moved the king’s heart to send him back to Jerusalem with supplies as well as letters of authority and even sent army officers and horsemen with him.

After over 100 years of hopelessness Nehemiah brought hope back to Jerusalem and just as God worked through Nehemiah 2,500 years ago, he can work through us today. And so, we're going to use this story of Nehemiah as a launching pad for the next week, because he was just an ordinary man who had a burden for the safety of his people. He looked on their situation and decided I can’t sit by and do nothing; somebody has to do something and it might as well be me.

The Bible says in chapter 2, when Nehemiah had arrived and surveyed the damage, he gathered the people together and told them in verse 17,

“You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace." I also told them about the gracious hand of my God upon me and what the king had said to me. They replied, "Let us start rebuilding." So, they began this good work” (Nehemiah 2:17-18).

I want to talk to you today about “The Good Work” and I am believing that God is going to speak to some of you, stirring you to commit to doing something, becoming part of something bigger than yourself. You see, Nehemiah had a choice, he could have acknowledged the dilemma of his people, he could’ve felt badly for them, he could’ve said a prayer for them and still not allowed it to personally affect him. But he allowed it to become a divine burden, this aching deep within his soul, this burden that he couldn’t ignore, and he determined to do something about it.

As we consider this story of Nehemiah, I want to ask you what it is that disturbs you and burdens your heart to the point where you cry out to God, “What can I do about this?” Maybe for you it’s those who are lost, without hope in the world, bound by an addiction, hurt, neglected, or abused? And so, maybe for you it’s getting the good news of Jesus Christ to those without hope in your community? What is it that breaks your heart and burdens your soul?

Nehemiah left a good job, traveled a thousand miles, surveyed the damage, and encouraged his brothers. He told the Jews about the gracious hand of God upon him and what the king had said to him. After hearing him the people replied,

“Let us start rebuilding." So, they began this good work” (Nehemiah 2:18).

Today, I would like you to consider what “The Good Work” is for you? If you've known me for long, you know I have a burden for those who don’t know Jesus personally and haven’t experienced the power of the Holy Spirit. And so, my desire is to teach the Word of God and empower the weak and the oppressed, those who have been stuck in a form of religion without knowing its power. My passion is to share the Word of God as the Bible says,

“The holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:15-17).

And it’s a good work, and I have a burden for the church, because that is the vehicle that God is using. It’s Jesus’ church and he is building it. In Matthew chapter 16, Jesus said,

“I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it” (Matthew 16:18).

And so, I love the church because it is God’s work, and when we come together, working in unity as the body of Christ, that’s when we can make a difference in the world. I believe as we open ourselves to feel the heart of God, exposing ourselves to the burdens that he has placed within us, he is going to use us to change this community in a greater way.

Today, I wonder what the church means to you, where do you see yourself, or what role is yours in the body of Christ? I think this is an important question to consider as we talk about “The Good Work” because the Bible tells us in first Corinthians chapter 12,

“Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it…” (1 Corinthians 12:27).

And so, what is that “Good Work,” that burden, that part that is yours in the body of Christ? I had asked you where you see yourself in the body of Christ and that is an important question to consider because our ultimate purpose is to do the work of Christ in the world as each one of us becomes more like Christ.

The Bible tells us in Ephesians chapter 4, that it was God who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, and why did he do that?

“To prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:12-13).

And so, it’s the calling of each member, the purpose, “The Good Work” of the body of Christ, is to increase the kingdom of God, growing in faith, growing in knowledge, becoming mature, and attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

The apostle Paul says it this way in Colossians chapter 1, he says “the good work” is to…

“Proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ” (Colossians 1:28).

And so, our mission statement at Christ’s Community Church is Reaching, Connecting, and Equipping people to become fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ. Our purpose falls in line with Jesus’ command to his followers in Matthew chapter 28, verse 19,

“Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matt 28:19-20).

And so, we are committed to reaching out to people throughout our community, connecting them to God through faith in His Son, Jesus Christ, equipping them to live abundant and successful lives based on the principles of God’s Word, nurturing them to full spiritual maturity, as evidenced by a lifestyle of obedience to the principles of Scripture, and sending them forth in ministry to serve and make disciples for Christ.

I believe this is “The Good Work” that God has for us in Emmitsburg and wherever you are. We do this by gathering together in worship, encouraging others towards spiritual maturity, equipping believers for ministry, and evangelizing the world for Christ. And so, no matter whether God has called you to serve him on the front lines or whether he’s called you to serve him by supporting others who are on the front lines, God will bless you and reward you for whatever you do. We are the church, and we are in this together.

In fact, I love this illustration in 1 Samuel chapter 30, where we find the story of David returning to camp with his men after a successful battle. Those who had stayed behind watching over the camp and guarding the supplies, met them rejoicing and excited to share in the spoils of the battle. However, some of those who had gone out to fight stirred up trouble because they were selfish and didn’t want to share with those who stayed in the camp. David responded so graciously and said,

"The share of the man who stayed with the supplies is to be the same as that of him who went down to the battle. All will share alike" (1 Samuel 30:24).

There may be some of you feel like you’re not really making a difference because you stayed back in the camp, you stayed back at church, while the others have gone out to fight on the front lines. Maybe you feel that what you have to offer to God doesn’t mean all that much, but the Bible tells us,

“God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it”

(1 Corinthians 12:24-26).

And so, God desires unity among his kids and I believe that many of us will be greatly surprised in heaven, because what we have done, what we have contributed, may not seem of great worth to us, but what may not be very valuable in the eyes of man, will be of great value in heaven.

Until then, we need to be faithful to God’s purposes, to doing “The Good Work” he’s called us to do today; remembering as the apostle Paul said to the church in Corinth,

“Neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor. For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building” (1 Cor. 3:7-9).

Knowing that we have been created for a purpose motivates us to develop our potential, it helps us to keep our priorities straight, so that we become all that God created us to be. As the Bible tells us in Ephesians chapter 2,

“We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Ephesians 2:10).

I wonder what it is that God has prepared in advance for you to do? What is “The Good Work” that breaks your heart, that burdens you, that crushes your spirit, and makes you cry out to God.

From beginning to the end Jesus knew why he came into the world and he knew exactly when he had accomplished his purpose. In Luke chapter 19, Jesus had invited himself to Zacchaeus’ house illustrating the words of Revelation chapter 3, verse 20,

“Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me” (Revelation 3:20).

Zacchaeus received him joyfully and became the guest in his own house because Jesus was now the master. Zacchaeus was a changed man with a new life because as Jesus said in verse 10,

“The Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost" (Luke 19:10).

Zacchaeus was not saved because he promised to do good works, he was saved because he responded by faith to Jesus gracious words to him. He recognized he was a bankrupt sinner who needed to receive God’s gift of eternal life and for Zacchaeus that day ended in joyful fellowship with the Son of God. Jesus came in and ate with him causing the people to criticize him for visiting a tax collectors house, but Jesus paid no attention to their words because he knew he had come to seek and to save what was lost.

In John chapter 5, verse 36, Jesus said,

"The very work that the Father has given me to finish, and which I am doing, testifies that the Father has sent me” (John 5:36).

Today there are hundreds and thousands of lost and unreached people within your area of influence and God commands each one of us to reach out to them. Jesus prayed for us in John chapter 17, and as he was praying, he said,

“As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.” (John 17:18).

And so, Jesus sends us, every believer, every follower, and in Matthew chapter 28 he said:

“Go and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19).

And so, the Church, the body of Christ is God’s plan to further the work of Jesus in the world. The church is the only real answer to the deep needs of unreached people. It’s not the government, education, or economic growth, because the only real answers come from Jesus through his Church. And today it’s his Spirit working in us that empowers us to share the good news.

In Acts chapter 1, Jesus promised his followers, he said,

“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you” (Acts 1:8).

And so, that power is Christ in us. God empowers us with his Spirit to do what we are otherwise incapable of accomplishing. This is so important because we believe that every person is of great value; and therefore, every person has the right to hear the gospel at his or her own level of understanding.

I don’t know who this is really speaking to, maybe it’s a bunch of you, but there is somebody who needs to do something. Maybe you’ve tried to keep it at a distance, but there’s something bothering you, and now you’re going to let it in. I believe that today there are some of you who are going to let it wreck you, you’re going to let the burden overwhelm you, and like Nehemiah you’re going to sit down and cry and pray about it. You’re going to call upon the power of God and he’s going to embolden you, and you’re going to stand up in faith and act.

In Mark chapter 16 Jesus said to his followers,

"Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well" (Mark 16:15-18).

I hope you can feel that, because you don’t have to be appointed by man if you are called by God. You don’t have to be chosen by people if God has given you a burden. If God prompts your heart and stirs your Spirit you just need to step into it. If you feel the presence of God stirring you and there is something that breaks your heart, you just need to trust God, step into it, and watch him move.

Nehemiah was an ordinary person just like you and just like me who was chosen by God to step into the burden and start “The Good Work.” He didn’t do it alone, but it didn’t happen until he started. He sat down and cried, he knelt down and prayed, and then he stood up and acted. He didn’t whine and complain about it because God gave him a burden and his misery became his ministry. Nehemiah said, “somebody has got to do something about this and it might as well be me.”

I have been praying that some of you, many of you, are going to get a vision for this and God is going to stir something up in you. Emmitsburg is going to be different because you’re going to get a vision for something, you’re going to say I’m not okay with this, somebody’s got to do something about this. And you’re going to open your heart to someone’s pain, someone’s hopelessness, someone’s lack of faith, some injustice, and you’re going to recognize that you are the one that God has appointed. I am believing for a church full of people committed to one another, committed to the mission of Jesus, who are going to get outside of themselves and let God take that burden and turn it into a calling. Let’s pray.

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