

The best that we can be – Psalm 33:6-22

(3rd January 2010 at 6:30pm)

Introduction

I don't know about you but my parents often used to say to me: "Jeremy, we don't really mind how well you do in your exams, as long as you do your best. We just want you to do your best."

It's something that a lot of parents say to their children

Of course you can't do better than your best can you?

It's impossible

Surely it's a simple statement of the obvious that no one can do better than their best at anything

But when we apply the question to our lives, we wonder if we can even do our best?

Are we even capable of reaching our potential?

Or in practice do we settle for second best?

Do we live our life not achieving what we were born to be capable of?

Do we live our life knowing that we could be so much more?

Wondering what might have been

If that's you, would you like to be able to change that?

Instead of a sense of guilt at lost opportunities, would you like to live in 2010 without regrets at what might have been?

Would you like to become the very best that you're capable of?

The very best?

Would you like that?

This evening I want to show you how it's possible to do this; how it's possible to reach our potential

This evening I want to show you how it's possible to satisfy that longing inside us, to be exactly the person that we're designed to be

I'm going to do this by looking at the magnificent God who is described in Psalm 33

We're going to look at:

- The God who designed and made us
- The God who plans for us
- The God who rules over us
- The God who loves us

Got that? God as our creator, planner, ruler and lover

So it would be great if you could turn to Psalm 33 in your Bibles. It's on page 560.

God as creator (vv6-9)

We'll start by looking at the God who designed and made us – our creator.

Verses 6 and 9 are some of the most amazing verses in the whole of scripture.

Let's carefully listen to them again:

⁶By the word of the LORD were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth. ⁹ For he spoke, and it came to be;

The heavens and earth are here because God spoke them into existence. Psalm 33 reminds us that simply by speaking, God made the heavens.

The stars and galaxies are the very breath of God (v. 6). Just as we breathe out a cloud on a wintery day, so God with one puff of his breath caused all that is to spring into existence.

The creation of all the heavens and the earth, out of nothing, wasn't a problem for God. It was *easy-peasy*.

And verse 7 even says that he keeps the seas in a jar in his pantry!

To be honest, the very idea of creation overwhelms us and it's right that it should. But confronted by the knowledge that God is the creator of all this – and us – what's the right response?

Well, the first thing to do is to acknowledge him

This may seem a trivial thing to do: that we need to admit to God's existence and accept his presence in the world. But in fact it changes everything.

Consider how ridiculous it is, to hope that someday we might become the person that we were born to be, if we're attempting to live without reference to the person who made us!

It's a bit like a painting disassociating itself from its painter – believing that it can exist without the person that made it what it is. Apart from it making no sense, why would you want to do this?

But that's what millions of people do: every day, every year, all their lives. They live their life without reference to their creator.

So firstly we must acknowledge God as our creator. Secondly, we must worship him.

Human beings are made for worship, and worshipping God helps us in our quest to become ourselves

But of course if you don't worship the right thing, you'll worship the wrong thing

Everyone worships something or someone

The only question is who or what

In a shop in Lewes there's a young woman who calls herself "the biggest ever Michael Jackson fan". I imagine that she's got some stiff competition out there for that title but never mind!

Her room is already full of Michael Jackson stuff and last week she told me that for Christmas she'd been given a huge life-size poster of him – it's going to fill the whole of one wall in her room.

Does she worship Michael Jackson? You bet she does!

Verse 8 says: *Let all the earth fear the LORD; let all the people of the world revere him.*

So the first step to being able to fulfil our potential – to begin to be the best that we possibly can be – is to acknowledge and revere our creator. To recognise that we live in his world and that we're to worship and be in awe of him.

God as planner (vv 10-12)

But God doesn't just create and then walk away.

God stays involved.

God isn't only our creator, he's also our planner.

What do I mean by this and how does it help us achieve our goal of becoming what we were intended to be?

Verses 10 and 11 remind us that both humans and God have purposes, and both make plans. But in the end it's not the purposes and plans of humans that are established, but God's.

It's vital for us all to realise whose plans ultimately count.

It's all important to realize that ultimately it's God who plans the world

It's God who plans churches

And it's God who plans lives—and that God's plans will always ultimately succeed even if from our currently limited perspective it sometimes doesn't look that way

God's plans always take precedence over our plans.

I've no doubt that 2010 is going to be a very significant year for lots of us

The Bamber's will certainly see a big change. In October JB goes off to university and we become empty-nesters. He can't wait to go. And we can't wait for it either.... At least that's what we're pretending!

Big decisions will have to be taken by many people.

If you're coming to the end of your schooling, should you apply to university? And if so, which one and which course should you try for?

Others of you will be changing jobs

Or moving houses
Or marrying
Or perhaps all three!

Southover Church itself has some big decisions to make this year.
Do we start an additional Sunday service?
Do we change our pews for chairs?
Do we build a new minstrel gallery at the back of church for our Gospel singers?

Okay, I don't think that last one's in Steve's mind – so far, anyway

How are we going to make all these decisions?

Are we going to seek God's plans for us as individuals and as a church?
Will we actively seek God's will for our future life?
Will we pray that God will use these decisions to make us what we're intended to be?

Or will we attempt to live our life independently of God?
Will we attempt to make these decisions without reference to him?

This is why verse 12 is so important!

¹²*Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD, the people he chose for his inheritance.*

In Old Testament times, the Lord freely chose to be the God of his people Israel. He appointed Israel to receive a special status out of all the nations.

But unfortunately it went wrong. Despite the blessings they received, Israel rebelled constantly. Sadly they went against God, rather than with him

They wanted to live independently of God.
So they ceased to be the people they were supposed to be
They ceased to fulfil their promise, their potential
They were left wondering what might have been

God as ruler (vv 13-17)

So, if we want God's blessings on us, we firstly we need to acknowledge God as our creator, and secondly we need to search out God's plans for us.

Thirdly, Psalm 33 reminds us that God is our ruler. He not only makes plans but he is all-seeing and all-powerful.

Our God isn't one of those modern kings or queens that exist mainly for ceremonial purposes. Our own Queen Elizabeth has very limited powers indeed.

But God's powers aren't limited.
Not only did he create all things in the past but he remains in charge today.

Verses 13 to 15 give us a fascinating insight into how our God works

Our God is the high and lofty one who from his seat in heaven sees and considers everything and everyone.

These verses show that he carefully considers all our works

Always, all the time, everywhere, day and night, God is watching.

Does it worry you that God is all-seeing?
That God is aware of your every move and thought?
Perhaps it should do
Because one day we're going to meet him!
You and me both
In person

And he won't need us to tell him that we didn't achieve our potential
That we weren't the best that we could be

The sad truth is that by ourselves we can never be the person that we're designed to be

We may strive
We may set goals
We may get qualifications
We may make every effort
We may do our utmost

But on our own we'll always fall short – always
We simply cannot do it by ourselves

But of course there is someone who has done it
There is someone who completely fulfilled their potential
We celebrated his birthday just 9 days ago – our Lord Jesus Christ

Jesus wasn't second best
Jesus was perfect in every way

Although we have a high and lofty God, whose magnificent residence is in the highest heavens, he didn't stay there. In his infinite love for us he came down to us to be born as the baby Jesus, a vulnerable child, in the most humbling conditions imaginable.

So despite our failings
Despite our inability to even reach our own standards, never mind God's
We can rejoice that our God is God
That he is all-powerful and all-seeing
That it is possible for us to look forward with confidence to the day that we'll meet him
Because in his infinite love God has provided us with a way to reach our potential
He's provided us with a way to be the very best that we can be

Provided that is, that we let God the ruler, become for us, God the redeemer, God our Saviour

God as lover (vv 18-22)

You see as well as being our creator, planner and ruler, God is also our lover.

Three times, in verses 5, 18 and 22, Psalm 33 talks about God's *unfailing love*
God loves us with a passion that we can't even begin to imagine
It's a jealous love – he won't let anything or anyone get in its way
It's a love that even cost him the death of his own son in agony, on a Roman cross

But it's a love that's given us a chance
It's a love that's given us a chance to become the person that we were designed to be
A chance to satisfy that longing inside us

When we accept that gift of love on a cross, we've taken the first and most important step.
We've become members of God's family
We've started on the journey to reach our potential, to become fully human

But what do we do then?
How can we make the most of this life-line that we've been given?
This new life that we've been granted?

Verses 20 to 22 make it clear that as members of God's family we should be waiting in patience as God forms us into the individuals that we're intended to be.

God is our help and our shield, but this isn't a static reality. We have to wait for that moment of deliverance, and this is how our faith grows.

We find this waiting difficult and so we're tempted to pray, "Lord, I want patience and I want it *now!*"
But we must trust that our God knows best

Of course trust isn't easy
It can be very difficult to trust – even when we've no reason to doubt

Just over ten years ago I went up the CN tower in Toronto with Fiona and JB. It's the tallest tower in the world, and at the highest level you can go there's an area of clear glass flooring, which can be walked on. You can see that apart from some glass there's nothing underneath you; nothing between you and the ground over 1000 feet below. Many people are simply unable to walk on it even though they're told it's safe, and even though they can see other people walking on it.

Sometimes it can seem a bit like that in our relationship with God
Sometimes it can feel as though there's nothing supporting us
Sometimes God asks us to put our faith in his promises and to step out of our comfort zone, onto what can seem like thin air

That's why trust requires submission to him
Submission to him, his plans and his timing

Psalm 33 tells us that God's favour rests on his own people who 'fear him' and 'whose hope' is in his 'unfailing love'.

So will we make proper use of that life-line that we've been given?
In 2010, will we wait in hope, and trust in God's holy name?
Because if we want to fulfil our potential, the choices we make in 2010 as they are in any year, will be vital.

Conclusion

So to finish let's recap what I've been saying.

This evening we've seen that the first step to achieving our potential is to worship and adore our high and lofty, creator God
We've seen that if we want God's blessings to shape us, we must seek out his plans for us
We've seen that if we're to have any confidence when we meet our all-seeing God in person, we must let God the ruler become God our saviour.
And finally we've seen that God's favour rests on his own people who 'fear him' and 'whose hope' is in his 'unfailing love'.

As we start into 2010, there'll be many choices ahead of us. Let's make them carefully, thoughtfully and prayerfully, in the sure and certain hope that one glorious day we'll have a chance to explain our decisions to his majesty, our God the king – personally!

You know the first Sunday in January is the perfect time to consider this

Turkeys are safe for another year
The mince-pies and brandy butter are nearly finished and that diet is about to be started (or maybe re-started!)
The presents have had a good going over
Christmas TV is finished
The video games have been played and completed
The iTunes gift vouchers have been used up
A New Year, in fact a whole new decade lies just ahead of us

Could there be any better time to think through what's important to us?
To make a New Year resolution that actually lasts longer than the time it takes us to think it up!
Could there be any better time to take the decision that we really do want to fulfil our potential

In 2010, let's have the courage to step out of our comfort zone and go the whole way with God.

In 2010 let's sign up for that Alpha course
Let's go for Baptism or Confirmation to make a clear statement of our faith
Let's take part in our CU at Uni
Let's make the upcoming Southover Lent Discipleship course a priority
Let's join a Home Group

In 2010, let's make sure that we do everything we can, with God's help, to work on becoming the very best that we can be

Prayer

²² *May your unfailing love rest upon us, O LORD, even as we put our hope in you*