

Welcome to Dothan 2015

I said last Sunday I was going to spend the last three Sunday's in July preaching what I called Pastor's Choice, preaching a sermon of mine from the past that really speaks to me. I preached this the first time twenty years ago, in 1995 and then I shared the same thought back in 2008. I called this message Welcome to Dothan and you'll see why as we go along.

Dothan was a biblical place, an area about 12 miles north of Samaria. It is really not a significant place, no storied history about Dothan. There is a tel there today, marking an ancient site and there is a Jewish settlement as well as a Palestinian village near there. They call it Dotan. Dothan, Alabama was named after this biblical city and if it wasn't for that Alabama town, most of us would probably have never heard of it. It's only mentioned twice in the bible with two interesting events happening there. Let me tell you about the second event first, then I'll tell you about the first time Dothan is mentioned in the bible.

Turn with me to **2 Kings 6:8** and I want to show you a great victory that happened at Dothan. Elisha is the prophet in the northern kingdom of Israel at the time. The King of Aram, which is part of modern day Syria, was at war with Israel. Every time he confers with his generals and his chief of staff and they make a battle plan as to where to set up camp, Elisha would send word to the king of Israel, warning him about a possible attack. The bible says, **"Time and again Elisha warned the king, so that he was on his guard in such places."** **2 Kings 6:10**

Imagine how frustrating this had to be for the king of Aram. He can't imagine how this is happening and it happened repeatedly. **"This enraged the king of Aram. He summoned his officers and demanded of them, 'Will you not tell me which of us is on the side of the king of Israel?' 'None of us, my lord the king,' said one of his officers, 'but Elisha, the prophet who is in Israel, tells the king of Israel the very words you speak in your bedroom.'" 2 Kings 6:11-12**

Before the days of listening devices and electronic surveillance, God was listening in on the conversation of the king of Aram with his generals and then revealing it to Elisha. Nothing is hidden from the living God. The king is convinced he has a spy or a traitor in his inner circle. "Which of us is on the side of the king of Israel? Who's the traitor?"

These Aramean officers had heard of Elisha the prophet. His fame had grown beyond

the borders of Israel. They tell the king about the prophet and the King sends out a reconnaissance team to locate Elisha. **“Go, find out where he is,’ the king ordered, ‘so I can send men and capture him.’ The report came back: ‘He is in Dothan.’” 2 Kings 6:13**

Welcome to Dothan. It looks to be a place of challenge. It may have been a place of safety and solitude for the prophet, at least for awhile, but that was about to change. **“Then [the king of Aram] sent horses and chariots and a strong force there. They went by night and surrounded the city. When the servant of the man of God got up and went out early the next morning, an army with horses and chariots had surrounded the city. ‘Oh, my lord, what shall we do?’ the servant asked.” 2 Kings 6:14-15**

It’s interesting, the tactical error of the Arameans. They thought they could take the man who knew their every move by surprise! Did they really believe they could surprise him given that he had known everywhere the king of Aram started to set up his camp? They didn’t realize who was revealing their plans to Elisha.

Elisha’s servant is frightened when he looks out to see them surrounded by horses and chariots of the enemy. “What shall we do?” Elisha tells him not to be afraid. **“Those who are with us are more than those who are with them.’ And Elisha prayed, ‘O Lord, open his eyes so he may see.’ Then the Lord opened the servant’s eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.” 2 Kings 6:16-17**

What a glorious revelation to Elisha’s servant. Those who are with us are more than those who are with them. If God is with us, he makes us a majority! We are prone to forget, but remember – if the Lord is with us, ultimately we’ve got them outnumbered. He can save and deliver us from any situation. May the Lord open our eyes to his supernatural provision and remind us again there are more for us than against us!

Imagine the confidence of those enemy soldiers as they make their move toward Elisha’s home in Dothan. “We’ve finally got him right where we want him. He is surrounded and outnumbered. It’s just him and his servant. What can he possibly do now?”

The problem was, Elisha was praying, “Lord, strike these people with blindness.” The Lord did as Elisha asked and verse 19 tells us Elisha told these now blind and confused soldiers they have come to the wrong city and the wrong road and they have the wrong guy, but trust me and I’ll take you to the guy you are looking for. Elisha led them straight into Samaria, the

capital city and into the presence of the king of Israel. After he got them where he wanted them, he prayed and the Lord opened their eyes and they realized where they were. The king asks of Elisha, “Shall I kill them?” Elisha said “feed them and give them water and then let them go.” It was a show of strength and mercy and the bible tells us as a result these bands from Aram stopped raiding Israel’s territory, at least for the time being.

The point of all of this is Dothan is a place of supernatural victory and deliverance. We quote that verse often to people, that there are more for us than against us. We point to this story to remind people that God is on our side and we don’t have to be afraid, regardless of the numbers, regardless of the power of the enemy. What God did for Elisha and his servant at Dothan in 825 B.C. he can still do for us today. Dothan would always be known as a place of victory. God’s enemies were defeated and his servants were victorious. Welcome to Dothan: a place of miracles and supernatural deliverance! Let’s live here!

Now turn with me to **Genesis 37**. Here is the first time the city of Dothan is mentioned in the Bible. Genesis 37 is the story of Joseph. You remember he was Jacob’s son, one of the twelve sons of his father. The bible says because Joseph was born in his father’s old age, he was his father’s favorite and the one with the technicolored dream coat. Joseph dreamed as a boy that God had a special plan for him and that his brothers would some day serve him. In the Middle east the youngest served the eldest so when he told his brothers about his dreams, that didn’t exactly make Joseph popular with his older brothers. The bible says they hated him (37:4).

Look at verse 12. Jacob, Joseph’s father had sent the older sons to Shechem to graze the flocks. They lived in a desert area and the best grazing area was to the north. In verse 14 Jacob, who was also known as Israel, sends Joseph to check on the flocks and on his brothers. From the valley of Hebron in the south, Jacob would travel north some 70 or more miles to get to Shechem. The bible says, **“When Joseph arrived at Shechem, a man found him wandering around in the fields and asked him, ‘What are you looking for?’ He replied, ‘I’m looking for my brothers. Can you tell me where they are grazing their flocks?’ ‘They have moved on from here,’ the man answered. ‘I heard them say,’ ‘Let’s go to Dothan.’ So Joseph went after his brothers and found them near Dothan.” Genesis 37:14-17**

Here is the first time Dothan is mentioned in the bible. This happens hundreds of years

before the events with Elisha so this is an ancient city. The bible tells us what was happening as Joseph approached his brothers. They plotted against him. **“Here comes that dreamer! Let’s kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns and say that a ferocious animal devoured him. Then we’ll see what comes of his dreams.” Genesis 37:19-20**

They really hated Joseph. You can read how Reuben tried to rescue his brother and finally, rather than kill him, they sold him to the Midianites who took him as a slave to Egypt. The brothers reported to their father that Joseph had been killed by a wild animal at Dothan and as evidence they showed Joseph’s coat of many colors which they had dipped in goats blood in order to deceive their father.

Welcome to Dothan. For Elisha and the nation of Israel, Dothan was the place of one of their greatest supernatural victories. The army of Aram was defeated without firing a shot! Not a single casualty. But for Jacob, for the man also known as Israel, Dothan was the place of unbearable heartache. Dothan was the place where God broke his heart and where he believed God had allowed his beloved son Joseph to be killed. Dothan was a place of abandonment. A place of betrayal. A place of bereavement. A place where all is lost.

This was true not only for Israel the father but for Joseph the son. Imagine how he felt. He was just a teenager. Betrayed by his brothers, sold into slavery, suddenly finding himself in Egypt as a slave to Potiphar (v36). There was to be no supernatural deliverance for Joseph at Dothan. No one pulled him out of the pit. No fiery chariots and angels surrounded him. For Joseph at Dothan it seemed there were more against him than for him. For Joseph instead of victory there was slavery and defeat. Dothan was not a good place for Joseph. It was the place where the bottom fell out, the beginning of all his troubles. Or was it?

Genesis 39 begins the saga of Joseph in Egypt. We don’t have time to read through all of the story, but most of you know what happened. Joseph, in spite of all the trouble he found himself in, never stopped trusting in the Lord, in spite of the bitter betrayal at Dothan. Sold into slavery, betrayed by his brothers, now in Egypt he is betrayed by his master’s wife. She keeps trying to get him to sleep with her and he refuses. He has such integrity, he refuses to betray his master and more importantly, he refuses to sin against God (39:7-10).

Potiphar’s wife lies about Joseph to her husband and accuses him of rape. Joseph is thrown into prison. In chapter 40 he meets the Pharaoh’s cupbearer and baker who are thrown

into prison with him. Joseph interprets a dream for each of them. The cupbearer will be restored to his former position and the baker would be executed and that's what happens. As the cupbearer is set free, Joseph says, "remember me and mention me to the Pharaoh and see if you can get me out of this prison because I'm innocent." (40:14). But the cupbearer forgot and Joseph spends two more years in prison (41:1). Two years. For something he didn't do.

Don't you imagine he wanted to curse the day he arrived at Dothan? He wanted to curse his brothers, the cupbearer who forgot him, maybe even curse God who it seems had forgotten him. But Joseph kept a right spirit and then something happened. Pharaoh had a dream that no one could interpret. The cupbearer remembered Joseph and told the Pharaoh about him (41:9-14). They bring Joseph out of the prison, he interprets Pharaoh's dream and look what happens. Pharaoh says, "**Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one so discerning and wise as you. You shall be in charge of my palace and all my people are to submit to your orders. Only with respect to the throne will I be greater than you...I hereby put you in charge of the whole land of Egypt.**" 41:39-41.

One day he is in prison and the next he is the second most powerful man in Egypt and remember, it all started at Dothan – the place of his greatest defeat and tragedy.

Where are you today? Dothan? Which Dothan? The one that is the place of your greatest victory and supernatural provision, where God showed up and everything turned out just the way you prayed and just the way you hoped and expected? Or are you at Dothan, where you are betrayed and in the pit and sold into slavery and no deliverer arrives? Are you at Dothan where Israel the nation triumphed or are you at Dothan where Israel the man wept and grieved over the loss of his son and refused to be comforted of his broken heart? **Which Dothan are you at?** And let me ask you one more question: **Does it matter?**

Ultimately, does it matter? You see the truth, the reality is, **God was at Dothan both times!** God has a plan for your life and he is working that plan for your good and for his glory and it just might lead through a place like Dothan. Either Dothan.

For Joseph, God saw that a famine was coming to the nation of Israel and he wanted to save his people. God saw Joseph and knew that he was the man he wanted to use to bring deliverance to his people. Joseph was a man God could trust with a big assignment, but how could he get this young Israeli kid into the palace and court of the Pharaoh of Egypt? How

could he get him close enough to speak to the leader of this pagan nation of Egypt? The answer? Take him to Dothan!

I don't know where you are. You may be looking around and it seems like you are at Joseph's Dothan, you are looking up out of a pit and wondering if things are ever going to be all right again. Your world has fallen apart while everyone else found God's supernatural provision at Dothan. You are wondering "what's wrong with me?" Don't compare yourself and your situation to anyone else because we've all got a different purpose and destiny. But don't despair and don't give up. I don't know which Dothan you're at, but it doesn't really matter because God has a plan for you and it is ultimately for your good. He must have needed you to go through Dothan for a reason. He is taking you somewhere for a reason and a purpose. If you are in Dothan and it seems like God hasn't shown up yet, maybe it's because he has an assignment for you and Dothan is the launching pad. Trust God and trust his timing!

Beginning in Genesis 42-50 there is a story of intrigue as the famine occurs as Joseph said. Because the Lord was with Joseph he had prepared Egypt for the famine and they had plenty of grain. Jacob who is really old now, sends his sons to Egypt to try to buy food so they can survive the famine. Joseph finally reveals himself to his brothers who had no idea that this Egyptian they were dealing with was actually their long-lost brother. Joseph had long ago forgiven them because he realized that God had been at work in all this. Joseph had learned that Dothan wasn't the place where God abandoned him, Dothan was the place where God launched him into the greatest adventure and miracle of his life. **God was there at Dothan after all!** How many of us can say that about what appeared at the time to be a terrible defeat or set back? We look back and realize God was there all the time and if it hadn't been for that event, I never would have...." **If it hadn't been for the events at Dothan...** God's at work at Dothan even when we can't see it at the time.

Look at what Joseph told his brothers. **"So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God."** **Genesis 45:8** The truth is, God didn't abandon Joseph at Dothan, he was positioning him for blessing, for greatness!

Look at Genesis 50:19 **"You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives."** **Genesis 50:19**

Welcome to Dothan. Don't be afraid of where you are, God brought you to this place for

a reason. He is taking you somewhere. He is teaching you something. He can't reveal everything to you just yet, but trust him. He will show you his provision, his deliverance, one way or another, all in his time. Maybe he needed to get you into a strategic place to touch someone like he did with Joseph and the only way to do that was to take you to Dothan, either to its' great deliverance or to its' pit and slavery. Maybe Dothan is your place of miraculous deliverance or perhaps it is the painful place that launches you into your destiny. I don't know, but I know God is at Dothan. Trust him. Rest in him.

We often quote this verse. In fact, this is Pastor Jeff's favorite verse: **“For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.’” Jeremiah 29:11.** “I thought that means bad stuff won't happen to me, that God will deliver me like he did Elisha at Dothan.” You understand who the Lord was speaking to in Jeremiah 29 don't you? Jeremiah was prophesying to God's people, telling them they were about to be carried off into exile. The plans God had for them would include 70 years of exile in Babylon but he would deliver them and bring them back and restore them. The plans would be carried out, but in God's timing.

God's plans might include Dothan. They might include slavery and prison in Egypt before you get to the palace like Joseph, or perhaps God will show up with chariots of fire and deliver you. I don't know which Dothan you are at today, but I know God hasn't made a mistake and in his timing and purpose he will bring you through. Paul said, **“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” Romans 8:28**

Wherever you are on the journey, trust Him. Maybe you need to again surrender yourself to his plan for your life. Perhaps you need to do as Joseph did and acknowledge that it wasn't just luck or circumstances that brought you here but God is the one that sent you to this place for his good purposes and all is well. **Don't be afraid. God is at Dothan.** God is here, even when you can't see him. God is at work, even when you can't understand how or where. He is at Dothan and he is right here with you, right now, right where you are. May God open our eyes as he did for Elisha's servant and as he did over time for Joseph. “Lord let us see you at Dothan.”