

March 23, 2008

This Is It!

I got an e-mail this past week that had a story in it. I loved the story so I thought I would share it with you. It's about a woman named Ms. Martha Cothren. And the story goes something like this. Back in September of 2005 on the first day of school Martha Cothren a social studies teacher at Robinson High School in Little Rock Arkansas did something not to be forgotten. On the first day of school, with the permission of the school superintendent, the principal and the building supervisor, she removed all of the desks out of her classroom. When the students arrived in the first period and entered the room they discovered there were no desks. Looking around confused they asked, "Ms. Cothren where's our desks?" She replied, "You can't have a desk until you tell me what you have done and earned the right to sit at a desk." The students thought for a minute and somebody said, "Well our grades." To which Ms. Cothren said, "Well you do need to make good grades that will get you into college but it won't get you a desk." Another student piped up and said, "We have to behave well." Ms. Cothren said, "Well you better behave or I'll be honest I'll kick you right out. But your behavior won't get you a desk." And so they went on coming up with things and no one got the answer first period, second period, third period, no desks in the classroom. Of course being the modern age most of these students had cell phones and so when they finished class they would get out of class and tell them Ms. Cothren doesn't have desks in our classroom she made us stand or sit on the floor. And the parents began to call the school and the school began giving them, "Well Ms. Cothren is doing some things a little different today." AND parents said, "that's not right!" so pretty soon they called the T.V. stations and by lunch all four networks showed up at the high school complete with cameras and everything and they started gathering around her classroom to report this crazy teacher who had taken all of the desks out of her room. When the final period of the day came and quite a stir was going on the puzzled students found their seats on the floor and went through the same series of questions. Finally she said, "Throughout the day no one has been able just what he or she has done to earn the right to sit at the desks that are ordinarily found in this classroom. Now I'm going to tell you." At that point she went over to the door of her classroom and opened it. 27 United States veterans all in uniforms walked into that classroom; each one carrying a school desk. The vets began placing school desks in rows and

they walked over and stood at attention alongside the wall. By the time the last soldier had set the final desk in place those students began to understand perhaps for the first time in their lives what the right to sit at those desks really meant. Martha Cothren looked at her students and said, "guys you don't have to earn your desk at all because these guys already did. When you come in and sit in these desks it's free to you but it wasn't to these guys and some of their friends who gave their life so you could sit here. Remember that now it's up to you to sit in them it is your responsibility to learn to be good students, to be good citizens. They paid the price so that you could have the freedom to get an education don't ever forget it."

Great story the question is, is it true or is it urban legend? I decided to check it out. The e-mail story comes from Mike Huckabee's speech to the Conservative Political Action Conference in Washington D.C. on March 2, 2007. You can find the whole thing in You Tube. Huckabee was the governor from 1996-2007 in Arkansas. Martha Cothren is a teacher at Joe T. Robinson High School in Little Rock Arkansas. The class is a class in military history. She is the daughter of a WWII POW and she often has veterans visit. Her class has organized a veteran's recognition week they have honored veterans of war, they have video taped veterans recounting their stories so that these would be preserved for posterity's sake. Her class has sent care packages to veterans and to men and women overseas serving in the armed forces. In fact in one year they wrote over 1200 letters to the soldiers overseas. In 2006 the Veterans of Foreign Wars named Martha Cothren Teacher of the Year. I share this story because I think I know how Martha felt. If you're teaching a class on military history and you're a daughter of a WWII POW you have a passion for the subject. You see she had a full comprehension a realization of the price that was paid for our freedoms in America. She wanted some way to convey that passion to say this is it do you see it? Do you get it? Remember it! You have to live it! I guess it touched a nerve in me because I felt the same way when I was a teacher. I taught science not everybody loves science but science is where God became real to me I could see God's creative hand as I studied science. I could see His fingerprints, his design while looking through the microscope balancing the chemical equation, or working with the laws of physics. When teaching I wanted to scream, "This is it! Do you see it?" I so wanted my students to get it this is the primary job of a teacher to motivate the students to engage themselves in their learning and make it a part of their lives. I think Martha succeeded you can see it in the lives of their students as they sent the letters as they have

done things for the veterans of war and the soldiers who are serving today. I know there were times that I succeeded in the classroom as I've seen students go on with a passion for science and a passion for it because they realize its Gods' work. Yet today I find myself in the same situation but at a much much higher level because this is it. Today is the defining moment of Christianity and this will not be a long drawn out theological discourse with lofty words and elegant prose. No, it's a very simple sermon with the truth of Easter.

Easter is the culmination of 33 years of life for Jesus Christ. It's the culmination of everything he did. Like all great religious leaders Jesus Christ was born though I must say his birth was a little more spectacular. Like all great religious leaders he died yet that death was different he didn't; die of old age like most leaders and he don't die fighting for his life some others. He was executed for doing nothing wrong he died to pay the price of your sin and mine. But it was more than that yes the wages of sin is death and we are familiar with physical death. When this tent or this body of ours wears out and stops working but our spirit lives on and there is something called spiritual death. What is spiritual death? Revelation 19:15 calls it the, "fury of the wrath of God Almighty." Isaiah 51:22 calls it, "The cup of wrath." Spiritual death is when God's cup, which has been filling up with His wrath, each day of each year that sin has run ramped its when His cup of wrath is poured out on those who do not love him and put their faith in His Son. How bad is that wrath? Consider 1 Corinthians 2:9 where Paul writes and says, "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him." This is what Paul says id spiritual life of heaven bit I think it would be safe to take that same verse and say, "No eye has seen, No ear has heard, no, mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who reject Him." The fury of God's wrath is what Jesus prayed about in the Garden of Gethsemane when he said, "Father if it is possible may this cup be taken from me." Jesus knew that he was going to experience physical pain and death but he also knew that he was going to experience the fullness of God's cup of wrath being poured out on him God's pent up wrath for every sin ever committed; a wrath we have no concept of, a wrath that caused Jesus to cry out, "My God, my God why have you forsaken me?"

Martha Cothren wanted her students to know, to understand, to appreciate and to take advantage of what the veterans had done for them. She wanted them to embrace their freedom and live their freedom not just celebrate it on the fourth of July. She said, "Now it's up to you to sit in them it is your responsibility to learn to be good students to be good citizens they

paid the price so that you could have the freedom to get an education don't ever forget it." Well these aren't desks in our church and so I couldn't remove the pews though I did think of taking out the cushions. But we do have pews cold hard wooden pews just like that cross was a cold hard wooden cross and the tomb was a cold, hard, dark stone tomb. But Jesus did rise this is it. This is where Jesus rises above and transcends all other religious leaders. When you come and sit in these pews you don't earn it it's free but it wasn't free for Jesus and I think Martha Cothren's words really fit Easter. I guess we could take those words and say, "Now it's up to you to sit in the pews, it's your responsibility to learn, to engage yourself in Bible study, to be good Christians, to be good evangelists. Christ Paid the price so that you could have the freedom to go to heaven don't ever forget it. Easter this is it don't ever forget it. It would be a shame if all we did was celebrate it one day of the year like some people celebrate their freedom in America on just the fourth of July. No good Americans vote, Good Americans are active in their community, good Americans make a difference and it's the same for a Christian. Good Christians live their faith every day of every week and they come to church and they praise their god every day of every week and when they sit in that pew they feel that cold hard pew every week and they embrace it and they say, "Christ won this for me."

In our Savior's name, Amen.