Do we worship the past or do we worship Jesus? Can we get stuck in our spirituality if we worship a specific time in the life of the church rather than the One, True and Living God? I’m a nostalgic person by nature. I remember the church the way it was in the 1960’s when the Protestant Church in America was at its height of attendance, influence and missional and financial effectiveness; I personally struggle with worshipping the past. I am too much like the disciples in the story we just read; too much I want to make three booths on the mountaintop.

So the story is that Jesus has gathered his disciples, Peter, James and John, up on a mountaintop to pray. Out of the power of prayer always come miracles. To sit at the feet of the Master in prayer always produces glory. And Jesus is transfigured as the glory of the Lord descends on Him. And, lo and behold, two men appear to speak with Jesus—one being Moses, the lawgiver, and the other being Elijah, the prophet; perhaps the greatest prophet in the Old Testament. You might say, Jesus is conferring with Moses who wrote the 5 first books of the Bible, called the Pentateuch, the Torah, referred to as the 5 books of the law. And Jesus is also conferring with Elijah, the prophet. All of the Old Testament is divided up between the law and the prophets. So you might say, that Jesus is having a conversation not just with Moses and Elijah, but also with the Old Testament itself. So what is this high level consultation about? Jesus notes in his seminal teaching on the law and the prophets in the Sermon on the Mount, He says: “Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them.” (Matthew 5: 17) So Jesus is the extension of, not the replacement of, the Old Testament law and the Old Testament prophets. He stands in the same line as Moses and Elijah. But He has come to fulfill everything that they had hoped would happen through the law and everything that was prophesied by the prophets. Look to Jesus and we discover what the law was intended to produce. Look to Jesus and discover what was the prophet’s dream. Only now everything in the law and the prophets is fulfilled and has come into being through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Now we as disciples are often so clueless. Me, too. It is strangely encouraging to me that the disciples of old were also so clueless about so many things. Even those who were taught at the foot of the Master didn’t get it all the time. So Peter, the most clueless wonder of all, blurts out to Jesus, “Let us make three booths; one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.” (Luke 9: 33) Even the Bible is astounded at how clueless Peter is because it then notes: “not knowing what he (Peter) said.” (v.33) This is kind Bible-speak for saying that once again something has come out of Peter’s mouth to show he just doesn’t get it. If you attended the very helpful class by Rabbi David Novitsky you will understand the background and meaning of the Festival of Booths as it applies to this story. The Festival of the Booths was that ancient Jewish Festival that was the most associated with God being the God of the Gentiles also. God always seeking to include non-Jewish peoples into the covenant of law and grace.
But Jesus demurs. He does not encourage them to build three booths. And the answer comes as a cloud descends and the presence of the Lord surrounds them, and a voice from the cloud declares: “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to Him!” (v. 35) Jesus isn’t just the lawgiver like Moses. Jesus is far more than just an earthly prophet like Elijah. No, no, no, Peter—Jesus is the SON OF GOD. He is the Chosen One. The Messiah. He is the fulfillment of the law and greater than Moses. He is the fulfillment of the prophets and greater than Elijah. Do not create three equal booths for Moses, Elijah and Jesus. If so, you insult the fact that Jesus is the only begotten Son of the One True and Living God. He is the way the Gentiles are going to be included in the Covenant. He is the fulfillment of the Festival of Booths.

But Peter, disciples, you are focusing on the past, on Moses, and on Elijah. And by doing so you are missing the glory and the power and presence of the Lord Jesus Christ who will do a NEW THING, a new song, the inclusion of all peoples on the face of the earth through Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Focus on the past and you miss the future.

Oh, the 1960’s; O them was the glory days. No, the 1940’s in the middle of World War II; O them was the glory days of the church, a nation on its knees in prayer. No, the turn of the last century’ them was the glory days; the great revivalists crossing the nation. No, no, the Great Awakenings in the 1800’s; them was the glory days; Whitfield and the Weslys crossing the American colonies bringing revival. No, Elijah the prophet, he was even ascended into heaven with a chariot of fire; them was the glory days, and they’ll never be again. No, no, no, Moses receiving the Ten Commandments, parting the Red Sea, the plagues of Egypt; them was the glory days. No. no, no—you just don’t get it disciples. Its not about nostalgia. Its not about the past. Its not what happened then that somehow we believe can never happen again. The church is always too busy building Booths of Nostalgia. It becomes unfocused from its mighty task. Pray. Focus on Jesus. And in His presence the GLORY comes. The light shines. By being focused on what used to be we will miss what can be, and what Jesus calls us to be TODAY...

Jesus didn’t even want His disciples to build Him a booth; to live in the past destroys the future. So how does the story end? It says, “On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great crowd met (Jesus).” (v. 37) Instead of building Booths of Nostalgia up on the mountaintop, the disciples follow Jesus where He leads, and they come down from the mountain, and discover a great crowd of people waiting to discover Jesus, the One who is the fulfillment of the law and prophets…the One who is the fulfillment of their dreams…the One who is the fulfillment of their lives. They would have missed it if they were sitting in a booth. Get out of our Booths of Nostalgia. Come down off of the mountain. Follow Jesus down into the valley where the people are, where the Gentiles are, where the ones who are to believe in Him are, and there we will discover the GLORY of GOD, the reviving of the church, and the fulfillment of why God sent Jesus into the world in the first place. Communion can be a passive sitting around in a booth of Nostalgia, meditating on our navels. Or it can be a powerful encounter with the GLORY of the Lord Jesus, who kicks us out of our comfort zones and down into the valley where His soon to be people are. Which is it for you today? Amen and Amen.

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IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!