

TAKE NOTHING FOR YOUR JOURNEY

“He told them: “Take nothing for the journey-- no staff, no bag, no bread, no money, no extra tunic. . . “ (Luke 9:3)

I'm sure there are many reasons why Jesus gave His disciples this training exercise. Two obvious benefits immediately come to mind. First, it would force them to live like the people to whom they preached. Second, it would force them into a daily dependence upon God. As they went into all the world to preach the Gospel, they could not take with them Jewish food and furniture. They could not make the vast world of the Gentiles like Judea. Someone quipped that when Paul went to Europe he had only a pocket full of seeds.

The brilliance of this strategy is illustrated by a contrast between two famous explorers, John Franklin and John Rae. Both men set out to discover the Northwest Passage to connect the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. One was a miserable failure, and the other a stunning success.

The Franklin Expedition had two big ships and five years of food supplies, including 8,000 tins of meat, vegetables, and soup. They also brought along an abundance of tents, guns, and ammunition. The expedition ended in disaster. Franklin and 128 officers and men all died. One problem they faced was that the lead solder used to seal their tins of food was poisonous. When their remains were found there was also evidence of cannibalism.

John Rae, by contrast, took virtually no supplies with him on his journey across the frozen tundra. He did, however, live for a number of years with the Inuit Indians who were native to the area. He became an expert canoeist and snowshoe walker. He honed his skills as a hunter and fisherman. He discovered that the native clothing was far superior to that worn by the English. He prepared himself for the ultimate test by snowshoeing 700 miles to Moose Factory and learning the art of surveying and the use of a sextant. In June 1846 he set out with 10 men, and two small boats. They spent the winter of 1846 - 47 in Repulse Bay living in igloos. They hunted and fished for their food. At the same time, hundreds of miles to the northwest, Franklin and his men were in the painful process of dying.

Rae did discover the “Northwest Passage” and the final body of water connecting the two oceans is named in his honor, Rae Strait. He made four successful expeditions throughout the frozen north making additional discoveries and drawing detailed maps.

The fate of Franklin was not known for certain until 1859. At this time Leopold McClintock led a search party that discovered their skeletal remains and a note indicating that Franklin had died on the 11th day of June, 1847. At this point only 24 men were dead. The rest abandoned their ships and died trekking southward.

But now let us seek to make a spiritual application to the facts before us. When we evangelize tribal people in the remote parts of the earth should we also “take nothing” with us but the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Was there anything in Judea that had to be carried to Africa or India? Can new congregations build meeting houses out of native materials? More to the point, can the Inuit Indians in Northern Canada take communion without grape juice and wheat bread? Is their privilege of communing with Christ dependent upon ingredients imported from thousands of miles away?

Many years ago a humorous story was making the rounds about a baptismal service at the river. One bystander asked if he too could be baptized. The preacher said, “Yes, but first of all you will have to step back 3 paces so you can come forward”.

Unfortunately, the traditions we drag to foreign countries are not always funny. Alan Hirsch in his book *The Forgotten Ways* tells of a small, bent, and soft spoken brother in the underground church in China. They affectionately call him “Uncle L”. He has no degrees, no office, and no titles yet is the recognized leader of 3 million believers. How sad that anyone would think of imposing upon them the corporate structure of the American church, or the intellectual sterility of Europe. The underground church in China may be the largest and most evangelistic church on earth. God help us if we poison their faith with tin cans, soldered together by theology from the West.