

BY JOHN BRADSHAW

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In 1633, a 27-year-old Dutchman worked at his easel and painted a picture that would come to be known the world over as “Storm on the Sea of Galilee.” The artist’s name? Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn.

As a young man, Rembrandt apprenticed with several painters and eventually opened his own workshop, specializing in portraits, self-portraits, and biblical scenes. He became well known throughout the Netherlands for his exceptional talent, and is widely considered one of the great artists in western European art history. He is credited with producing several hundred paintings and

thousands of drawings. In 2009, a Rembrandt sold at auction for more than \$30 million.

Rembrandt was known as a religious person, no doubt influenced by his Roman Catholic mother and his Dutch Reformed father. Of all the biblical scenes he captured on canvas, perhaps none is so intriguing as “Storm on the Sea of Galilee,” the Dutch master’s only seascape. It’s an impressive painting.¹

It portrays the New Testament account of Jesus and His disciples traveling by boat across the Sea of Galilee, enveloped in a ferocious storm. The painting depicts clashing clouds in the dark heavens, and frothy, angry waves. Light illuminates part of the fragile craft. Several disciples have scrambled to secure the vessel while others cling to the mast, desperation on their faces. In the back of the boat, Jesus rests peacefully, His face a picture of serenity in stark contrast to the chaos around him.

But something else also stands out. There are fourteen men in the boat. Jesus had only twelve disciples, so one would expect to find thirteen

1 “Storm on the Sea of Galilee” was stolen from a museum in Boston, MA, in 1990.

people. So who is that mysterious thirteenth disciple pictured in the lower portion of the painting, peering over the edge of the boat? Many people believe that Rembrandt—who occasionally inserted a self-portrait into his paintings—painted himself as the thirteenth disciple in the boat.

What was Rembrandt trying to communicate by placing himself in the midst of that storm on the Sea of Galilee? He may have been saying he was in the midst of the storm of life, or he might have been recognizing that only Jesus can save someone from the waves of despair that inevitably wash over a person's path. While it is never easy to interpret an artist's thinking, we can, like the disciples depicted in Rembrandt's famous painting, turn to Jesus for help no matter what life brings.

A friend e-mailed me recently. His message was direct and to the point. My heart ached as I read, "My beautiful son has died. Please pray for me.... The profound grief I feel is almost too much to bear."

Grief is an intruder. Human beings weren't created to grieve. "In the beginning," when "God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1),

He placed Adam and Eve into a perfect world. They were created to love, laugh, enjoy, and delight, but loss was not part of God's original plan for humanity. Therefore, when loss comes, it's foreign to us. It hurts. It's painful. It's uncomfortable.

Since sin entered the world, grief has become a part of everyday life. No one on Planet Earth escapes the often-crippling sorrow and pain that is part of the human experience. Massive waves of despair, doubt, and darkness frequently accompany grief or loss. Losing a spouse, a child, a family member, or a friend—especially if the loss occurs unexpectedly or prematurely—is a life-altering experience that often brings with it unfathomable grief and hurt. Divorce or separation are events that can stretch one's emotional capacity to breaking point. An accident, the loss of a limb, the death of a pet, or even the loss of a possession can cause episodes of grief that cut deep. Losing a job, being the victim of a crime, or receiving a challenging medical diagnosis can affect a person dramatically.

The Bible has a lot to say about loss. Even before God created the world, "there was war in heaven" (Revelation 12:7, KJV). A third of the angels