

[1]

Have you heard or seen the Moai statues on Easter Island? They are monolithic human figures with overly large heads.



They were built to honour chieftain or other important people who had passed away. There are about 900 statues on that island, and the tallest one is about 20 meters high and weighs more than 90 tons. The Moai Statue was one of the Seven Wonders of the World for a long time.

One of the most mysterious things was how to move those big stones down from the quarry at the crest of the island to their platforms at the seaside. There have been several hypotheses related to the matter. A few years ago some scientists tested moving a statue weighing about 4 tons by tying its head with ropes and using two groups of people taking it in turns to pull it from both sides.

That experiment was successful, but the problem is that it doesn’t guarantee much bigger ones can be appropriately moved through that method. So, many scholars still guess that the Islanders would’ve used log-rollers to transport those big stones. To make log-rollers, they would’ve required many big trees. What’s interesting is that the Easter Island is a barren wilderness now; there is no forest. But, archaeologists disclosed that there was once a dense forest.

Then, what happened there? Scholars say that there were some tribes on the island. They had erected the statues to honour their important people, but at some point, they started to make them in competition with other tribes. They wanted to show off their power and wealth by erecting the figures as many as possible, as big as possible.

As a result, they destroyed the environment by cutting down big trees in a haphazard way, and the island became a wasteland. As the forest disappeared, they couldn’t make big canoes, which means they couldn’t travel far out to sea to catch whales. In the end, they were marooned on the island; their economy

plummeted, so wars broke out to occupy limited food and resources; cannibalism spread, and the population dropped sharply.

The history of Easter Island shows well, how human obsession with power and wealth destroys communities, devastates nature, and kills people. The Maoi statue was the fundamental cause of the fall of the Islanders.

[2]

We can find another similar story in the Bible. That is the narrative of the Babel Tower recorded in Genesis 11. According to the scripture, the descendants of Noah settled down in a plain in Shinar, and built a city with a high tower made of bricks.

Genesis 11:4 expresses well the reason they built the tower: “Come, let’s build ourselves a city and a tower that reaches to the heavens. Let’s make ourselves famous so we won’t be scattered here and there across the earth.” Here, the tower that reaches into the sky symbolises their greed for showing off their power and wealth.

Interestingly, Talmud, a central text of rabbinic teachings, contains extra stories related to the great tower. The section of Rabbi Eliezer says as follows: “The builders brought the bricks up on the east side and brought them down on the west. If a man fell down and died, no heed was given to him. But when a brick fell down, they stopped work and wept, saying, “Woe unto us! When will another be brought up in its stead?”

This record reveals the inhumanity of the construction site then, in which there was no human rights and justice. Building the tower quickly was everything. On top of that, to burn huge amounts of bricks, they would’ve cut hundreds and thousands of trees relentlessly. The narrative of the Babel Tower also reports how human obsession with power and wealth might cause injustice and inhumanity, destroy communities and nature, and in the end lead to total destruction.

What’s remarkable is that according to Genesis, God confused the people with different languages, so that they might not communicate properly, and then scattered them all over the world. Yes, God intervened in the evil situation and stopped building the tower to protect human beings from destruction.

In this regard, the Babel Tower was a space of God’s grace generated at the place of inhumanity. This story isn’t just an old legend, God has still intervened in unfair situations, confused evil thinking and plots, and scattered the unjust so as to save the weak and the marginalised. This is the reason we can hope- although we are sinful and hopeless. This is the reason we can light a candle of hope not only today but also every day.

[3]

So, the prophet Isaiah declares in today’s first Bible reading as follows: “Since the world began, no ear has heard and no eye has seen a God like you, who works for those who wait for him.” Furthermore, Isaiah compares this God as the potter fashioning us the clay to be a people of God.

The parable of the potter and the clay shows well the inextricable relationship between God and human beings, and God’s continuing works for creating and recreating us and his artisan spirit. This parable also provides us with an insight into how to overcome the danger of total destruction due to human greed and obsession found in the events like the tower of Babel and the Moai statues.

The bottom line is that at the centre of those events there is human arrogance. Genesis 11:4 discloses the core of human arrogance: “Come, let’s build ourselves a city with a tower that reaches to the heavens.” The essence of human pride is the desire to be like God. This desire is an extension of the original sin of human beings that ate the fruit of knowledge in order to be like God.

But, the parable teaches us that the purpose of our life isn’t to be like God, but to be fashioned as God wants. We are not the potter making our life and controlling others, but the clay to be a channel of God’s love and justice. Yes, we are God’s clay; this is our true identity that we should recover every moment of life.

[4]

Darlene Zschech is an Australian Christian worship leader and singer-songwriter who has made dozens of beautiful hymns. She became well-known with the Hillsong music. One of her songs is ‘The Potter’s Hand.’ In that song,

she confessed, “Beautiful Lord, wonderful saviour I know for sure, all of my days are held in your hands, crafted into your perfect plan.”

Many people might think that she has had no problem at all in her life journey, but her life at times has been anything but charmed. For example, she’s had bulimia, the eating disorder; she suffered a miscarriage during pregnancy and endured financial problems. However, she doesn’t hesitate to say that her life is crafted into God’s perfect plan because she believes that she is the clay and God is the potter.

[5]

Sisters and brothers,

Most of us would like to erect a statue like the Moai, boasting our power and wealth; we want to build a high tower to be like God. But they aren’t the way to live meaningfully, but to die meaninglessly. The way for living well together with our neighbours is to commit ourselves to the hands of God remembering our identity as God’s clay.

I would like to close today’s message with reading the lyrics of the Potter’s Hand. I hope that these words can be our faith confession.

Beautiful Lord, wonderful saviour  
I know for sure, all of my days are held in Your hands  
Crafted into Your perfect plan

You gently call me, into Your presence  
Guiding me by, Your Holy Spirit  
Teach me dear Lord  
To live all of my life through Your eyes

I’m captured by, Your Holy calling  
Set me apart  
I know You’re drawing me to Yourself  
Lead me Lord I pray

Take me, Mold me  
Use me, Fill me  
I give my life to the Potter’s hands  
Hold me, Guide me  
Lead me, Walk beside me  
I give my life to the Potter’s hand