

Yung Suk Kim. *Messiah in Weakness: A Portrait of Jesus from the Perspective of the Dispossessed*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2016. ix +146 pages. \$21.00, ISBN 9781498217453.

In *Messiah in Weakness*, Yung Suk Kim presents an alternative understanding of weakness. He portrays the historical Jesus through a lens of weakness that deconstructs the traditional dualistic understanding of strength and weakness, in which strength is seen as positive and characteristics such as mercy, solidarity, and change of mind are considered weak and negative. Kim repudiates the theology that considers human or social weakness as the result of sin (2) and the view that the only way for individuals to get out of this “fatal” weakness is to believe in Jesus (the “strong”), who took the form of weakness and died on the cross for them (3).

For Kim, weakness *per se* is not a negative quality. The experience of weakness in our lives or in the world can also lead to strength/power (1). The dualistic perspective on strength and weakness leads us to an incomplete understanding of human beings in general, and of Jesus in particular. For Kim, the hybridity of weakness and strength is the nature of human beings and is necessary for understanding the historical Jesus (3). Kim achieves his argument by depicting Jesus through a lens of weakness shaped by the following principles:

1. All beings in the world are weak and exist in weakness.
2. Because of the realization that all are weak, we can see others as part of us.
3. Weakness can become the condition for strength if it is rightly understood and practiced, that is, through an attitude of mercy.
4. Social ills and injustices are weaknesses that we have to identify and to engage with by advocating “for the weak” with the virtue of mercy (17).

Jesus’ view of weakness, according to Kim, is that “human beings are weak *and* strong,” not that “human beings are weak *but* strong.” (46) By this he means that weakness and strength exist together within every human being all the time, rather than that examples of strength sometimes appear in the midst of a person’s general weakness. Jesus’ earthly experience can be described as marginalized, since he was born in a small city, was raised by a single mother, and worked as a *tekton* (usually translated “carpenter,” but more accurately “a dispossessed peasant trying to survive as a rural artisan or landless laborer.”). All of these would portray Jesus as weak. However, Jesus’ re-interpretation of the Spirit, prayer, water baptism, and religious symbols, as well as his teaching by means of parables, demonstrates that he advocates an alternative wisdom of weakness, i.e., that the world must be ruled by mercy and solidarity, not by the strength and power (68). Through compassion that grows out of weakness, Jesus favors the poor, embraces the weak, and heals the sick. Out of his own weakness, he identifies with the powerless, favors those who are economically disadvantaged, and embraces children who are physically, spiritually, and socially weak (96). Jesus’ crucifixion also is a paradox of weakness and justice. Being weak (2 Cor. 13:4), Jesus is unjustly executed by aristocrats, but God vindicates the unjust death of his faithful servant by raising him from death. His crucifixion, therefore, is a paradox in the sense that the weakness of Jesus, who is unjustly executed, stimulates the powerful judgment and justice of God (117).

Kim’s reconstruction of *Messiah in Weakness* reflects Paul’s understanding of weakness in Rom. 1:18-20 and 2 Cor. 12:9-10. Kim also finds similarities between the teaching of the New Testament and that of the ancient Chinese philosopher Laozi in *Tao Te Ching*. Kim hopes that his reader will conceive of weakness as a new paradigm for humanity in which the strong and the

weak can prosper together, recognizing that human beings are born with both strength and weakness (125).

Messiah in Weakness indicates that Kim's theological position rejects the interpretation of the death of Jesus as atonement and expresses his desire for social justice and transformation. It also reflects his concern for those who are designated as weak and are discriminated against as a result. Kim promotes compassion, mercy, faithfulness, and obedience, which he believes are mislabeled as negative characteristics. It is significant that Kim's contextual or cross-textual reading relates the teaching of Jesus with Laozi's *Tao Te Ching*.

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