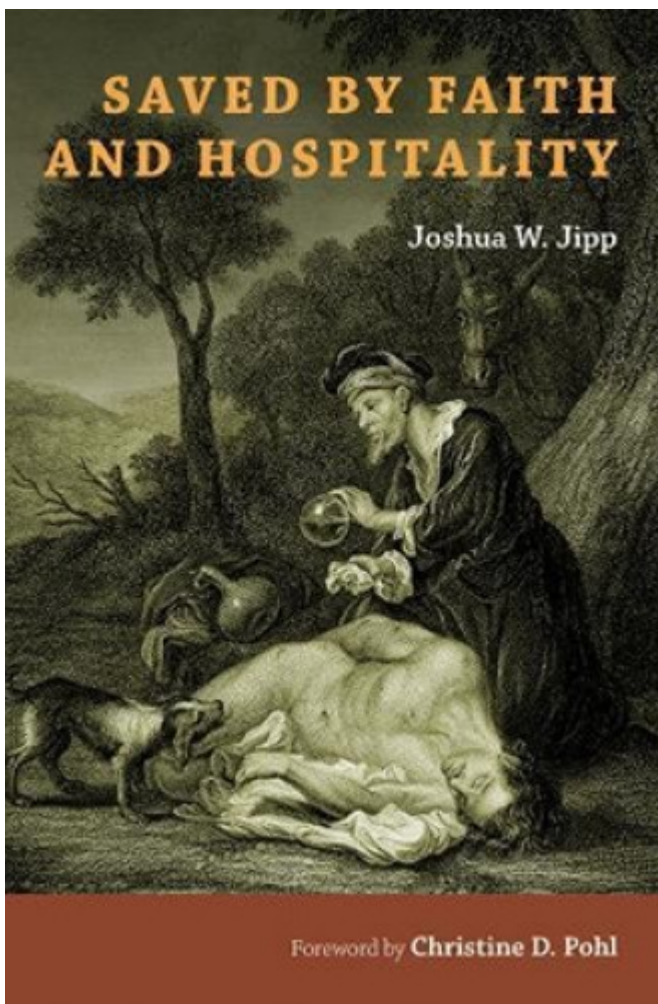


Biblical hospitality

Joshua Jipp's book does something few biblical scholars attempt: it offers explicit proposals for the church.

by [Greg Carey](#) in the [April 11, 2018](#) issue

In Review



Saved by Faith and Hospitality

By Joshua W. Jipp

Eerdmans

Joshua W. Jipp has written a book with soul, an unusual book at multiple levels. He blends a fairly traditional thematic reading of scripture—he's written about hospitality and the Bible—with explicit proposals for the church. Each chapter begins with reflection on a contemporary issue, works through scriptural material, and concludes with pointed suggestions for faithful living. Few biblical scholars address ecclesial concerns so directly.

Jipp makes two arguments that are daring within his context, that of conservative evangelical theology. The first is doctrinal. Evangelicals strongly embrace the Reformation doctrine of *sola fides, sola gratia*, or justification by grace through faith alone. But Jipp highlights biblical cases in which the giving and receiving of hospitality provide the means of salvation. These case studies extend far beyond isolated passages to include the structure of entire biblical books. Jipp argues for hospitality as a means of salvation.

Jipp is also somewhat daring in addressing issues like caring for poor people, prisoners, and refugees. Often evangelicals have been the Christians most likely to extend direct aid to people in need, especially in global contexts. But the overwhelming majority of white evangelical Christians supported Donald Trump, and Trump's policies markedly embrace "extreme vetting" and a "tough on crime" stance.

Jipp shows clear awareness of these tendencies. He acknowledges how Latinos and Latinas face daily suspicion and "constant policing" in the United States, along with the "popular xenophobic rhetoric that has often characterized the Religious Right." In addition to naming these realities, Jipp also notes that many Christian organizations work with compassion and generosity in resisting xenophobia. He even takes on the notorious Sodom and Gomorrah account, reading it as a case of violence against strangers and thereby implicitly rejecting its application in antigay polemics.

Sections on "Divine Hospitality" and "Human Hospitality" express Jipp's distinctive vision of hospitality. It begins with God, and then we humans participate in and pay forward the hospitality we have already received. In each section, case studies pop up from all over the canon. Ancient meals generally reflected honor and patronage status, Jipp argues, but Luke-Acts foregrounds hospitality that transcends social

stigma. For that matter, Luke-Acts shows that even barbarians extend hospitality. In 1 Corinthians, Romans, and Philippians, Paul models table fellowship that embraces diversity and even disagreement. And John's Gospel sets forth Jesus as the host and source of nourishment, defining mission as inviting others into God's hospitality.

The second half of the book argues for the need to overcome tribalism the way Paul does with his captors and barbarian hosts in Acts 27-28; xenophobia, as we see in Genesis 18-19, Judges 19, Ruth, and the Torah; and greed, as modeled in 1 Timothy, James, Revelation, and Jesus' teaching on banquets in Luke.

I don't agree with all of Jipp's judgments. I dissent from his claim that Paul calls Christians to maintain their social status according to the guidelines in 1 Corinthians 7. That is Paul's general rule, but he offers exceptions for believers in difficult circumstances, notably slaves who have an opportunity to gain their freedom. And while New Testament authors indeed exhort believers to maintain harmonious relationships with their neighbors, I am surprised Jipp does not examine their motives. Above all, many interpreters regard the irenic counsel in Romans 13 and 1 Peter as attempts to protect vulnerable believers by advising them to avoid suspicion. Hospitality would not be a primary motive in either case. Further, Jipp assumes that Paul wrote 1 Timothy, without acknowledging the minority status of that judgment.

Most important, I regret that Jipp does not address biblical material that doesn't sit so well with his thesis. He uses the book of Ruth as a case study in overcoming xenophobia, but Ezra's purge of foreign women and their children does not appear anywhere in the book. The pattern of conquest and genocide in the Bible poses a major and unacknowledged problem that needs reflection.

Despite the occasional disagreement, there's much to admire here. Jipp values the entire canon, often demonstrating how Israel's scriptures ground the practices of Jesus and his early followers. His erudition runs deep; his interaction with other scholars is generous. He allows his own story to inform his reading of scripture in ways that model responsible engagement.

Some readers might regard the final chapter—a call for discernment regarding economic systems and values—as somewhat disconnected from the topic of hospitality. But it's one of my favorite chapters. There Jipp explores theological assessments of economics and brings forth a critique of greed and patronage.

Hospitality enters the picture in eating settings, where both Jesus and Paul call for feeding all people regardless of status. Jipp is a bit cautious. Rather than rejecting capitalism, he calls for discernment regarding all economic systems. Nevertheless, his courage shows through.

Each chapter concludes with a series of discussion questions that are suitable for use in adult education settings. I highly recommend this book not only for that purpose, but also for our common reflection and for scholarly reference.