

## 3/3/24 - Acts 17:1-15 - "Receive the Word"

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[ 0 : 00 ] The reading will be of Acts 17, verses 1 through 15. In your Bibles on the chairs, this is page 926.

Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews.

And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, this Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ.

And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women. But the Jews were jealous, and taking some wicked men of the rabble, they formed a mob, set the city in an uproar, and attacked the house of Jason, seeking to bring them out to the crowd.

And when they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some of their brothers before the city, authorities shouting, these men who have turned the world upside down, have come here also.

[ 1 : 23 ] And Jason has received them, and they are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus.

And the people and the city authorities were disturbed when they heard these things, and when they had taken money as security from Jason and the rest, they let them go. The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived, they went into the Jewish synagogue.

Now, these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica. They received the word with all eagerness, examining the scriptures daily, to see if these things were so. Many of them, therefore, believed, with not a few Greek women of high standing as well as men.

But when the Jews from Thessalonica heard that the word of God was proclaimed by Paul at Berea also, they came there too, agitating and stirring up the crowds. Then the brothers immediately sent Paul off on his way to the sea, but Silas and Timothy remained there.

Those who conducted Paul brought him as far as Athens, and after receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible, they departed. That is the word of the Lord.

[ 2 : 38 ] Amen. Well, good morning, everyone. Good to be preaching again after, I guess, it's been a few months. And I think the last time I preached in Acts was back in chapter 6, so it is exciting to be preaching in Acts again.

As we read, we're going to be spending time in the first part of chapter 17, looking at the church in Thessalonica and the church in Berea.

But if you are new to the series in Acts, I want to back up a little bit and give you a little bit of an overview of what we've been reading about specifically in Paul's missionary journey.

And so if we remember back to Acts 15.36, Paul set out with the mission of returning to visit the brothers in all of the churches, rather the cities, where he had proclaimed the word of God previously, and to see how they were doing.

And so I think this is his missionary practice to revisit these churches and to encourage them and to see them face to face as he often longed to do so.

[ 3 : 54 ] But as they passed through the region of Galatia, where he had previously been visiting, he had a vision or a dream, perhaps, and he heard a call from the Spirit to go and to preach the gospel to the people in Macedonia.

I don't have a map for you, but I know the Pew Bibles don't have a picture, but you can always find pictures of Paul's missionary voyages. This was his second missionary voyage, for your reference.

And so he actually skips through the region of Asia, not the Asia we think of today, but the region of Asia in Greece, between Galatia and Macedonia, because the Holy Spirit told him, or rather restricted him from preaching to the churches in Asia.

He later preached to them during his third missionary voyage. But for now, he skips to Macedonia, and he goes by sea from the north, landing near Neapolis, and then visited the church in Philippi, which is what Brent preached on last week, where he spent time in jail.

He spent time proclaiming the gospel to the jailer, and then upon being released from jail, he made his way southwest through Macedonia, and later into Achaia.

[ 5 : 17 ] So I think his voyage kind of progresses like the plot of an action movie, right? Each scene is a new foreign location, right? Just to increase the budget of the movie, but in this case, because Paul had a passion to bring the gospel into all the world.

And so we see through these verses a rising action. The time in each location seems to be getting shorter and more intense, and the mission is building towards the climactic return to Jerusalem.

But in each city, Paul is accomplishing his mission of spreading the gospel and also facing opposition and then reluctantly moving to the next city.

Along the way, he visits numerous cities. We saw last week that he was joined by Timothy. He spent time in jail. But he also witnessed God's miraculous work of transforming first sellers of fine clothing, then also a fortune teller who was a slave.

He saw God work in a jailer and his family, and he also saw God work in Jews and Greeks alike. In addition to visiting the brothers, as he called them in each town, referring to the Christians, he also made a habit of visiting the synagogues of the Jews, the Jewish location for gathering.

[ 6 : 50 ] It was his habit to visit them first, and these were usually synagogues where the dispersed Jews from the exile period had settled and founded their own synagogues, and Paul, being himself a Jew, had a passion to reach the Jewish peoples throughout the dispersion.

We could say his aim was to convert the Jews, but being a Jew himself, I don't think that was really his mission, since the Jews already believed in God.

His mission was to persuade them that Jesus was the Christ that they had been waiting for, that they had been expecting. I think as we look at these verses, if there's one key thing I want us to take away from Paul's mission, it's not a one-size-fits-all mode of evangelism or apologizing in the sense of persuasion, not in the sense of being sorry.

But I think what we should take away from this is Paul's self-sacrificing struggle for the salvation of his brothers and sisters, Jew or Gentile, in every nation, and that the desire of his heart and his prayer to God is for all to be saved, as he later said in Romans 10.1.

So as we look to Acts chapter 17, we will see Paul's zeal for this mission. But before we begin, I want to take a moment to ask the Holy Spirit that he would guide us to understand, to believe, and to apply these words to our own lives.

[ 8 : 24 ] Let's pray. Holy Spirit, we do come to you and humbly ask that you would work in our hearts to receive your word with all eagerness.

Lord, to search the scriptures, to examine, to understand them, to interpret them, and that you would apply them to our lives. Lord, that we may grow to believe in confidence and hope in all of these things, but most importantly, to believe that Jesus is the Christ and that in him we have forgiveness of sin and newness of life.

We thank you in your holy name. Amen. So I've broken the text into, naturally, two parts. The first part being the time in Thessalonica, and the second part being the time in Berea.

And so the first part, I want to focus on verses 1 through 9 and Paul's mission to Thessalonica, and I've titled this point, The Gospel is Persuasive.

So Paul, he continues his voyage with Silas. Timothy, it doesn't seem, is with them at this time. Perhaps he left him behind in Philippi, although it's not clear.

[ 9 : 41 ] It's just Paul and Silas continuing their mission through the cities of Amphipolis and Apollonia. Those are fun names to pronounce, but I think that's right. But either way, Luke doesn't really mention much about these two cities.

He kind of just mentions that they exist and moves on to Thessalonica. And so perhaps whatever took place in these cities was uneventful, or more likely Paul didn't stop to visit them, but went to the larger city in the region with the expectation that the gospel would spread there into these smaller cities.

We see as Paul arrives in Thessalonica, his first stop is the Jewish synagogue. He makes his way to the synagogue. And I don't think, although we may expect it, that Paul was here seeking confrontation or debate.

I think he was seeking to bring the good news of Jesus to his Jewish brothers and sisters. After all, this news may not have yet made its way into the region of Macedonia, and so they may not have even heard the news of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

And so Paul spends three Sundays in the synagogue examining the scriptures, reasoning with them, explaining these things to them, and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and placing emphasis specifically on Christ's suffering, but also on his resurrection.

[ 11 : 12 ] There were those who didn't believe in a resurrection, and so he went there with the aim of showing them not only that Christ must die, but also that his mission had not failed in dying, but in fact, through his death and resurrection, his mission was accomplished.

Now I want to point out because it may seem to us that this gives us confidence to say that we can persuade people through reasoning in the scriptures, right?

But I don't think that is the point Paul later said specifically to the Colossians, that he doesn't rely on human precepts or teaching or what might be referred to as plausible arguments to make his case. What we should see is that he turns to the ultimate source of authority, the word of God, to make his case, to show that Christ's death and resurrection were necessary for redemption and the forgiveness of sins, and also to show that Jesus was in fact this Christ that they were waiting for. I find it interesting that Luke doesn't mention any of these scriptures for us, right? we perhaps can think of some that he may have used, but none of them are recorded for us.

[ 12 : 32 ] And this isn't the only time that Luke seems to skip over the verses. He made a similar point in Luke 24, 27, that Jesus opened the eyes of his disciples and showed them all the scriptures that pointed to himself.

And once again, he doesn't offer us any of those scriptures. So, why does he leave them out? Right? I would like to know specifically what scriptures he used.

I know I was certainly curious, but I think there's a reason that Paul left them out. I think, firstly, it's because those he was speaking to were the Jews.

they knew the scriptures. They knew the Old Testament. They were expecting the Messiah, the Christ, the anointed one of God. And they also knew that Moses and the words of the prophets spoke of Christ, the Son of God, the King of Israel.

We see this, I think, most vividly in John 1, 45, when Philip excitedly tells Nathanael, we have found him of whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Joseph.

[ 13 : 54 ] And a few moments later, Nathanael said, Rabbi, you are the Son of God, you are the King of Israel. And so the Jews were well prepared to recognize the Christ, and yet they still rejected him.

However, those whom God called, they indeed recognized him as Jesus Christ. I think, secondly, the reason Luke skips over the verses is because it's not a specific part of the Old Testament that speaks of Jesus, but rather the entirety of the Old Testament speaks of Jesus.

And he couldn't simply rewrite it here, but instead point us back to it. Now we see as we continue in verse 5 that not all were persuaded by the Scriptures.

Some of the Jewish leaders were jealous and stirred up wicked men to attack the house of Jason. Jason was perhaps a Christian living in the city of Thessalonica, and the missionaries, Paul and Silas, were likely staying with him, and so they attacked Jason, and they dragged him and also some of the brothers, the Christians, into the street before the authorities, and then they made accusation.

They said that these men were turning the world upside down, as it were. I think perhaps there was some truth to this, but rather the gospel was turning the world right side up.

[ 15 : 35 ] It wasn't true, however, that these Christians had acted against the decrees of Caesar, or that they had declared Jesus to be king of Rome in Caesar's place.

Although they believed and were convinced that Jesus was the king of kings, they made no attempt to overthrow or deny the Roman government, but regardless of the lies, some of the wicked people believed what the Jewish leaders were saying, also the governing authorities believed them, and they so forced Paul to leave the city.

We see that not only did they force Paul to leave, but in verse 9, they took money as security from Jason and the rest. They took this bond of security that would only be returned when Paul left the city, and so he was forced to leave.

Now, it's interesting. I think as Christians, we often take for granted we know why the Jews felt threatened, but specifically, why were these Jewish leaders threatened to the point that they would oppose Paul and force him to leave?

How was their authority threatened? I think in one way, as Paul says in Colossians 2, 14 and 15, when God canceled the record of debt that stood against us and those who believe by setting it aside and nailing it to the cross, he disarmed the rulers and authorities of this world and put them to open shame by triumphing over them in Christ.

[ 17 : 22 ] In other words, the righteousness found through the gospel freed those who believed from seeking righteousness through works of the law, because as Paul said in Romans 10, 4, Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

And so the Jews' power to exercise control through legalism was under threat because those who believed were no longer under their control. And so they fiercely fought to remove Paul before he turned their world upside down.

despite this opposition, though, the Holy Spirit worked through the Scriptures to open the eyes of those that were listening at Thessalonica, and upon hearing the word of Christ, we see that many Jews and Greeks believed in addition to many of the leading women.

And so their conversion, it testifies to the truth and reliability of God's word, of his promises. promises. And also, I believe the opposition that they faced confirmed that the gospel was indeed turning the world right side up.

We remember Jesus' promise back at the very beginning of Acts, chapter 1, verse 8, that the disciples were to be his witnesses in the world. They were to give public testimony of their faith, and they were also to suffer at the hands of those who would refuse the gospel.

[ 18 : 55 ] Paul clarifies this point in 1 Thessalonians 2, that their gospel proclamation, it was never in vain. Rather, God had granted them boldness to declare the gospel of God, even in the midst of conflict.

And the brothers in Thessalonica, they received the gospel not as the words of men, as Paul would say, but as the word of God, which is at work in the believers. And he further clarified that in doing so, they became imitators of the church of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, as the gospel message continued to spread to the ends of the earth, achieving God's intended purpose.

I believe that today the gospel still finds its efficacy in the authority of the scriptures, which are empowered by the Holy Spirit to cut to the heart of those who are called by the Lord.

We saw this in Acts 2 with Peter's sermon when it cut to the heart of those who were listening. We know also that the word of God is living, it's active, it's sharp and piercing and discerning, but that not all who hear it will receive it as good news.

In fact, many will reject it, they will deny the scriptures, and in some cases they will oppose the messenger. But I don't think this should dissuade the messenger.

[ 20 : 24 ] I think instead it should bear witness to the authenticity, the authority of the gospel as the very word of God. If the word of God fails to cut to the heart, how is it supposed to bring people to repentance, to be baptized in the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins?

It will face opposition. I know, myself included, that no one wants to face rejection or opposition. I think many, Christians included, have a paralyzing fear of rejection.

I think that describes much of my life, and yet God called me to proclaim the word. We must remember, though, it's not us that they are rejecting.

Jesus said in Luke 10, 16, the one who hears you hears me. The one who rejects you rejects me. The one who rejects me rejects him who sent me.

He warned also in John 15, 18 to 25, when he sent out his disciples, that they would be hated and persecuted by the world on account of his name. Why? Because the gospel shows the hearer to be guilty and convicts them of sin.

[ 21 : 40 ] We will face rejection. But as Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 2, we find boldness in God to declare the gospel of Christ amid conflict.

Not that we might please man, but that we might please God. Moreover, we must remember that the gospel is good news. It's life and freedom from sin to those who accept it.

Paul preached despite opposition because the people of God were very dear to him. Even before they accepted his words, they were dear to him, and so he proclaimed the word to them. He was motivated by the great love of God, and he preached the gospel to Thessalonica, even when they were dead in trespass and sin, because he believed in the power of God to make them alive in Christ.

Christ. And so I ask you, when you return to work tomorrow, to the office, perhaps school or hospital or factory, when you meet with your colleagues or your students, your patients, your customers or your clients, those who have previously rejected the gospel, will you see them only as dead and trespassed in sin, or will you see them as lost souls in need of good news, of forgiveness of sin, and of the great love of God in Christ?

[ 23 : 11 ] When you gather with your family and friends, perhaps today or later in the week, those who claim to know God but live a life that proclaims otherwise, when you visit with those who have previously rejected God's word, will you see them as dead and trespassed in sin, or will you see them as lost souls in need of the good news?

In either case, we must remember, amid opposition, amid conflict, even amid rejection, that if just one person receives the word of God, the call of God, we have gained a brother and sister in Christ. Paul's mission, it continues in Acts 17.10 as Paul leaves Thessalonica, he and continues to Berea. Moving into my second point, I've titled this point, The Gospel is Persistent, and we'll look at verses 10 to 15.

Now, Paul was forced to leave. He certainly didn't leave willingly, but he was forced to leave by the jealous leaders. As he said later in 1 Thessalonians 2, specifically verses 14 and 16, these leaders displeased God and opposed all mankind by hindering him from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved.

Paul was physically torn away from his work in Thessalonica, but his heart, as he said, remained with them. And so he continued to endeavor eagerly with great desire to see them again.

[ 24 : 52 ] However, he knew that if he stayed, the work of the gospel would be hindered by continued opposition, and so he left, and then he sent Timothy to continue building the church.

And then he made his way about 45 miles southwest to a city called Berea, where he continued the work of sharing the gospel. Apparently, his previous rejection didn't slow him down, because the first thing he does upon arriving in Berea is to go to the synagogue of the Jews and to proclaim the gospel.

He was persistent. We see, though, that the Jews in Berea were more honorable than those in Thessalonica, and so they received the word with eagerness.

I don't think Luke's point is that the Thessalonians were not honorable. In fact, Paul spoke very highly of their faith, but rather that the Bereans' faith was even more so than the Thessalonica church.

Upon receiving Paul's words, they examined the scriptures daily to verify what Paul claimed. Now, I don't think their examination was that of a skeptic.

[ 26 : 12 ] I think they had great regard for the authority of scripture, and so they examined the scriptures to see if what Paul claimed was in fact true. Even with his apostleship and the stories I'm sure they heard about him, they reasoned that his words must hold true to scripture if they are to be accepted.

And so, seeing that Jesus was indeed the Christ, many of the Bereans believed, with many of the Greeks and women of high standing as well.

But once again, Paul faces opposition. The news had spread somehow back to Thessalonica, and the Jewish leaders made their way down.

Forty-five miles was not a short trip, probably a few days' journey, but they were zealous to remove Paul from turning their world upside down, and so they made their way to Berea.

They again agitated a crowd, turned them against Paul, and Paul faced opposition, and was once again forced to flee the city, this time being brought by the sea to Athens for the mission to the Gentiles.

[ 27 : 27 ] The proclamation of the word of God was to continue, and again to face opposition. But we'll save that part for next week. But I want to point out Paul's persistence.

He demonstrated that no amount of rejection or shame or suffering could keep him from bringing the good news to the people of God. But I really don't think that was what Luke wanted us to marvel

at.

I think he instead wanted us to marvel at the faithfulness of God. God had promised and purposed to redeem his people, including those dispersed throughout the world, as he said through the prophet Jeremiah, specifically in chapter 23, verses 5 through 8.

And although Satan hindered him and made every effort to stop his mission, the word of God prevailed. God disarmed the rulers and the authorities of this world, put them to open shame, triumphed over them.

And the Holy Spirit will accomplish the will of God, as it did in Jerusalem and Judea, and now as we see it doing to the ends of the earth.

[ 28 : 40 ] And Paul also reminds these leaders that, as he said in 1 Thessalonians 2.16, they will face the wrath of God. I think this moment in redemptive history, as Paul shared the gospel with the Thessalonians and Bereans, is quite remarkable, quite profound.

In these few verses, we see that the word of the gospel, it found authority, first of all, in the ancient scriptures, the Old Testament. It was born witness to, as many came to believe.

They also confirm the New Testament to be the word of God, sort of passing the torch from the old to the new. As Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 2.13, the Thessalonian church received his word for what it was, the word of God, and so authorizing the New Testament to be the very word of God. These verses also confirm the focal point of all scripture, new and old, to be Jesus the Christ.

Perhaps you've heard of the Bereans, right?

They're often referred to in our day as model Christians. And so we can find countless sermons and articles written about them, about these verses and their dedication to the word of God.

[ 30 : 06 ] I want to make a brief mention of what we can learn ourselves from these words. By noticing that they received the words of Paul with eagerness, they examined the scriptures daily, and many of them believed that Jesus was the Christ.

I want to note first that they received Paul's words, right? They received eagerly. But they also gathered daily to examine them, to discuss them, and to interpret their meanings.

Now we know that the Bereans being Jewish, rather the Bereans within the synagogue being Jewish, were well acquainted with the scriptures, and so they lived in expectation of the Messiah. And so upon hearing Paul's words, they received them eagerly.

They were eagerly awaiting news of Christ, and so they received Paul's words eagerly. But not without gathering to examine the scriptures and verify the authenticity of the message.

I think this should cut against Western individualism, because it removes the individual from the position of authority on the interpretation of scripture.

[ 31 : 19 ] It instead puts the word of God as the final authority on the interpretation of scripture. And it also shows that interpretation was something done in community.

It was a corporate endeavor, and it was done with great deliberation. We all have easy access to the Bible, including on our phones. But we must not neglect the importance of gathering to examine the scriptures, to examine their meaning.

I believe there are no lone sheep Christians, right? Although personal Bible reading and devotion time is imperative to the Christian walk, to growth, it's not sufficient on its own.

Growth requires eager reception, devoted examination, encouraged faith, which happen in community. I believe this is why the church has for centuries followed this model and recorded for us their interpretations in creeds, in catechisms, and in commentaries, and also in countless sermons.

It's why we devote time each week to gather with the church, to examine the scriptures, to discuss them, to interpret them, and then to apply them to our lives.

[ 32 : 40 ] Even the most experienced pastors and preachers surround themselves each week by what some of my favorites call old friends, in reference to the commentaries, to discuss with those of ancient times, the scriptures, to unfold the interpretation of the word, which they are convinced, as we should be, is the final authority in the church.

Second, we notice that the Bereans believed. Specifically, they believed that Jesus is the Christ. Upon examining the Old Testament, they found faith to believe Jesus was, in fact, the promised Son of God.

And so we see that the good news of the gospel is not unique to the New Testament. Although the mystery, as Paul said, had been hidden, it's been revealed through Christ.

With the news of Jesus' life, his death, and his resurrection delivered to them by Paul, the Bereans found a deeper understanding of the scriptures and understood that they pointed to Jesus as the Christ.

And so we see that Jesus is the light which illuminates the scriptures, and his spirit, the one that opens our eyes to see the truth. I think this should help us in our own examination and study of the scripture.

[ 34 : 05 ] We should expect that the Old Testament and New Testament complement one another. That the New Testament serves to illuminate the Old.

That the Old Testament serves to uphold the New. And that in all, Christ should be magnified. That should guide our interpretation.

The third thing I want to point out, specifically from verse 15, is that Paul later sent Timothy to Thessalonica, where he probably also served the Bereans and the surrounding regions.

Paul didn't simply share the gospel and run. He instead established churches with faithful teachers to continue unfolding the word of God. He said in 1 Thessalonians 3.2 that he sent Timothy to establish and exhort them in their faith, that they may stand fast in the face of affliction.

And his prayer for them was that they would increase and abound in love for one another and for all, that they may be established blameless and holy before God at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[ 35 : 18 ] And so after believing, we continue to examine the scriptures and gather so that we may be, as Paul said, knit together in love, that we may have full assurance and understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ.

Through the word of God, we are encouraged and exhorted, charged to walk in a manner worthy of God who calls us into his kingdom. The scriptures, old and new, remain the source of exhortation and encouragement that the church may grow in faith, in obedience, and love.

Fourth, lastly, having access to the Bible, which we believe to be the closed canon of God's specific revelation, along with the overwhelming volumes of commentaries, we must not grow complacent or apathetic of God's word, of examining the scriptures, of gathering to discuss them, and of applying them to our lives.

I think this extends not only to the church, but also to our time outside of the church, where we are to gather with our families to examine and discuss the scriptures, in smaller groups and even one-on-one.

We are to continue daily examining the scriptures. And I believe if we do so, we will see faith grow, and we will see many believe.

[ 36 : 45 ] As we close, changing the subject a little bit, I've had midterms on my mind this past week. Just got through them at YSU. And it's around this time each semester that I make the unfortunate decision of comparing students' homework scores to their exam scores, which often reveals the correlation that those who don't do their homework usually don't do well on their exams.

Right? Sorry if this is triggering PTSD for any of you. But as a teacher, it's always quite frustrating, frustrating because I care about my students' success, to see them struggle in class because they're not putting in the work when they had the time, when the risk was low and the reward was high.

I know my wife has similar frustrations when working with patients, myself included, who don't take her advice or follow through with their treatment, only to find themselves in much worse condition shortly after.

This is true, though. How often do we put off the routine maintenance on our car or our home or ourselves until something goes catastrophically wrong, and then it's far more expensive to fix the problem than it would have been to apply a little bit of incremental maintenance?

I'm sure Tom knows all about this with brakes and oil changes, right? But then, should we really expect anything different when it comes to the Word of God?

[ 38 : 25 ] When we neglect to read His Word, to examine it, to gather to understand it, should we really be surprised by the resulting catastrophic failures? Now, yes, there will be opposition, there will be rejection, there will be difficulty as the Gospel cuts to the heart of sinners, but success, which I believe means seeing many believe and many transformed and sanctified through the Word of God, only happens when we take time to daily examine the Scriptures and apply them to our lives.

Remember, the Great Commission didn't end with going to the world and make disciples and baptize them in the name of the Father, the Spirit, and the Son. It ended with, teach them to obey all of my commands.

Those commands are found in both testaments of the Scripture. To know them and to find the faith to obey them requires examination, study, application, through which the Holy Spirit brings about faith to believe and obey.

And then, just like the Thessalonian church and the Berean church, our faith sets the example to all who believe as Paul commended them.

Let's pray. and hence, the aim is to understand there is another thing. For the honest there is such an example to do that, on the way to recreation to review, on the way to the beginning.

[ 40 : 02 ] And then, there is a mouth and the power and the■■■■ are all ears playing, that means it's a very big Prize to maintain the feeling the way as you introduced your mama and you can imagine that you can convince me