

Celebrating the Family of Joseph and Emma Smith

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My name is Denver Snuffer. I'm an attorney from Sandy, in Salt Lake. It's a suburb of Salt Lake. I graduated from Brigham Young University's law school. And I'm an excommunicated Mormon, because one of the things they taught me to do in law school was to critically think. And as a result of critically thinking, I followed a number of historical issues through to their logical conclusion. I wrote an alternative history of the Restoration, explaining how I think it might better fit within the scriptural model that says the Gentiles were going to behave in a certain way. And I was told, "Either withdraw that book from publication or we're going to excommunicate you from the Church." And I had contracts in place that obligated me to leave it in publication, so I got the boot.

Now, I didn't come to Mormonism from birth. I was born to a Baptist mother. And I learned that Joseph Smith was a ne'er-do-well founder of a cult and someone to be feared, not admired. I grew up in Idaho. I was in the military during the Vietnam conflict, but I was stationed stateside. I was in New Hampshire and ran into a Mormon fellow who sicced Mormon missionaries on me, who proceeded to pamphleteer and filmstrip me. And over the course of a number of months, they finally persuaded me to actually take Joseph Smith seriously.

I was at the birthplace of Joseph Smith in Sharon, Vermont; spent a weekend there. It was Aaronic priesthood commemoration, and this was, more or less, a campout. While I was there, I went to a visitor's center, took a copy that they gave me (for free) of a triple combination, in which the fellow that was befriending me suggested I read Section 76: the Vision of the Three Degrees of Glory. I read the Vision of the Three Degrees of Glory, and it struck me that a **scoundrel** could not write this. A **fraud** could not write this—the loftiness of the content, the beauty, the symmetry, the light that came through. This shook me up because I'd been very dismissive of the whole Joseph Smith thing, and now here I have something (from the very scoundrel) that read like a transcript from heaven. It was disturbing. But I finally resolved to seriously investigate whether or not Joseph Smith amounted to much.

I was baptized into the LDS version of Mormonism when I was 19 years old. I was baptized on September the 10th of 1973. I was excommunicated from the LDS Church on September the 10th of 2013—40 years, to the day, from the time I came into the LDS Church to the time that I went out. But where I came in, reluctantly accepting Joseph Smith to be an actual messenger from God, I went out firm in the conviction that Joseph Smith was everything he purported to be and probably more. He probably understated it.

If you read the words of Joseph Smith—

One of the best --One of the best places to get your hands around Joseph is to get one of the Joseph Smith History versions (that you find in the LDS publication of the Joseph Smith

History) and just read the account of the visit of John the Baptist when Aaronic priesthood is bestowed. Then (in the LDS version) they give you a footnote, and the footnote is Oliver Cowdery's account of the very same thing. Joseph Smith's version is **remarkably understated**—simple words, small vocabulary, homespun, plain. It reeks of honesty and simplicity. And then you read Oliver's account of the very same thing—it's ornate, it's flowery, it's overstated, it's lawyered. I mean, to his discredit, after he left the Church, Oliver Cowdery wound up practicing law. And we all know what the scriptures have to say about lawyers. So Oliver certainly fell from grace [comment said sardonically].

Joseph Smith is an enigma. He is a blank screen onto which you project who **you** are, literally. I have read probably every document that Joseph Smith ever authored. I have studied every journal that was written for him. I've read all of what the critics and the anti-Mormons had to say about Joseph Smith. Anytime a new Joseph Smith biography rolls out, I'll get it, and I'll read it.

If you take the moment that Joseph Smith died (June the 27th of 1844), if you take that moment and you go backward in time, and you say, "How do I construct the history of Joseph Smith from the beginning of his birth in 1805 until June the 27th of 1844, using only materials that existed at or before the moment of his death?" you come away from that endeavor saying, "Joseph **could not possibly** be a polygamist."

You heard him say a moment ago that Joseph Smith III and David and Alexander—they came out to Utah. You know that when they came out to Utah, it so upset the apple cart that their first cousin, Joseph F. Smith—who would subsequently become president of the LDS Church—began, in the same 1860's when they came out, to go around to get affidavits, in an affidavit book, of women who would swear an oath that Joseph Smith practiced polygamy and/or was their plural husband and/or taught them about polygamy. All of these affidavits were created in the 1860s. Brigham Young had the notion of polygamy taught publically for the first time in 1853. Joseph Smith had been dead for nine years by the time it became public news. Well, the best way to get people who are loyal to Joseph Smith to accept a principle that you want to advance, is to pin it on Joseph Smith, whether it belongs there or not. But the people who knew Joseph best had a very different view of where that originated.

On that evening when the angel visited him in his home, Joseph Smith recorded—and this was in 1838, he recorded—*He called me by name...* (This is the angel Nephi—turned into Moroni, subsequently, but the angel Nephi:)

He called me by name, and said unto me that he was a messenger sent from the presence of God to me, and that his name was [in the original it said Nephi; in this version it now says] Moroni; that God had a work for me to do; and that my name should be had for good and evil among all nations, kindreds, and tongues, or that it should be both good and evil spoken of among all people. (Joseph Smith History 1:33; see also JSH 3:3 RE)

First words out of his mouth. First words out of the angel's mouth: "Get used to it, Joseph. People are going to say things. They're going to say things that are good about you, and they are going to speak evil about you." And the angel goes on to describe a few other things. The

light gathers around him; he departs. And then the light starts up again, and the angel shows up again. And when he shows up again, *He commenced, and again related the very same things which he had done at [the] first visit, without the least variations* (ibid. vs. 45; see also RE 3:7), which means that the second visit that occurs that night, the angel tells him the same thing about how people are going to talk about him, both good and evil.

Then he ascends, and he returns a third time. And the third time: *But what was my surprise when again I beheld the same messenger at my bedside, and heard him rehearse or repeat over again to me the same things as before; and added a caution* (ibid. vs. 46; see also RE 3:8)—not to try and get the plates to get wealthy. Three times that night, and it starts out the very same way all three times, “Joseph, your name is going to be had for both good and evil”—on the same night.

Then Joseph, the next morning—he’s tired; he goes out to work. When he goes out to work, his father says, “You’re unable.” And he sends him home. On his way back home, he collapsed from exhaustion. When he wakes up from that collapse:

First thing...I can recollect was a voice speaking unto me, calling me by name. I looked up, and beheld the same messenger standing over my head, surrounded by light as before. He then again related unto me all that he had related to me the previous night. (ibid. vs. 49; see also RE 3:10)

So for the fourth time, he gets told the very same thing.

Audience Question: So why was it Nephi, when we’ve always thought it was Moroni, then?

Denver: The name got changed to Moroni **later**. In all of the early accounts, the name of the angel is Nephi. Joseph Smith wrote that the name of the angel was Nephi; he wrote that.

Audience Question continued: In his history?

Denver: Repeatedly. In multiple accounts of his history, the name was Nephi.

One of the little known facts about the visit of the angel is that before the three witnesses got their vision of the plates, the angel that would show those plates to the three witnesses appeared to the Whitmers’ mother. Mother Whitmer saw the angel, and he identified himself to her also, and he identified himself by the same name—as Nephi.

Well, I have a supposition, and I’ll give you my supposition, okay? Moroni was the last one to write in the book. He was the one to finish the record, and he was the one to bury it. And therefore, someone got to thinking: if he was the one that buried it, and if Nephi had lived long ago and wasn’t around when the book got finished—wasn’t around when Mormon condensed it, wasn’t dealing with the text at the end, and Moroni buried it up—maybe we should say it was Moroni, ‘cause he was the one that put it in the ground. Makes more sense; he’d know where it was.

But there's a problem with that. Joseph Smith was very clear about the intangibility of a spirit. A spirit is not composed of the same stuff as are resurrected beings, who are composed of physical matter after the resurrection. Moroni lived 400 years **after** Christ's resurrection. There is only going to be a general resurrection, that will include him, at the Second Coming. Nephi, on the other hand, lived 600 years **before** Christ. And at the resurrection of Christ—it's recorded in Matthew—that many of the saints that slept, arose and went into the city and were seen by people. So, people in Jerusalem saw that there were resurrected beings.

And then in His discussion with the Nephites, Christ said, "Hey, Samuel prophesied that when I arose from the dead that there would be others who were resurrected. He prophesied of that; and it happened! And that's not in your record." And so, the Book of Mormon has that commentary by Christ. As He looks at the records, He says, "You have omitted the fact that there were those who would be resurrected." Well, Nephi would have died at a point that he would be one of the candidates for resurrection, which means that he could easily handle the plates.

The Three Witnesses saw the plates, and were shown them by an angel who took the plates and opened and turned the pages to show them each one of the pages that had been translated. And so, it makes sense that the name of the angel would have been Nephi. If you think that Nephi couldn't be told where to go and find the plates, I mean, that's just plain silly. You do not need the **last** guy who handled them and put them under the stone in the box to be the only guy who... "Shhhh, keep it a secret. I buried the plates there. No one knows." And so, I think the reason the name got changed was someone thought it through and concluded it makes more sense to have the fellow who buried the plates be the one who restores the plates, instead of thinking it through the rest of the way and saying, "Wait a minute; he would be a spirit being—in spirit prison and incapable of physicality."

Audience Question: So the Mormons have—don't they have Moroni at the top of the temple?

Denver: Yes, they do. It's silly. Yeah.

Audience Question: So, well, that should've been Nephi, then?

Denver: It should've been, yeah. It should've been.

Audience Question: I guess they could always say it's Nephi?

Denver: No, no, they are very clear: it's Moroni. Yeah, think he's got a name tag on, representative of—

I shouldn't be irreverent like that, actually. Okay, so, four times he appears to him.

By the way, John Whitmer was called to be the Historian for the Church. John Whitmer had all of the records that existed in the LDS Church (the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints—no hyphen, small 'd'—unlike what the LDS claim today). And he was

excommunicated, disaffected, in the 1838 timeframe. So, the history of Joseph Smith that you read in the LDS version was Joseph Smith sitting down to re-write the missing history that they couldn't get back from John Whitmer, and it's a replacement history. It was written in 1838. And in 1838, he said it was Nephi. It was copied; he proofread the copy in 1839—it was again Nephi. He published his history in the *Times and Seasons*—it was Nephi. The first time that it shows up with the name Moroni, I believe, was in the *Messenger and Advocate*. I think that's where it first shows up, and that paper was edited by someone other than Joseph. So, it crept in there.

So, Joseph composes a replacement history in 1838. The Missouri conflict breaks out, later, in 1838. And Joseph winds up arrested and confined—ultimately confined in the Liberty Jail. While he's in the Liberty Jail, he writes a very lengthy letter—it's written in two parts, but it's a single letter, portions of which have been added to the LDS version of the scriptures. And in one portion, after Joseph has been pouring his heart out about the circumstances and asking God why he's being put through this gosh-awful mess, and why his people have been put through what the people have been put through, and why isn't God answering him and doing something and pouring out His anger on the people?—Joseph gets a letter from home. It excites his mind. The letter is brilliantly written about how his mind, it's going from one offense to the next to the next like lightning; he just, he cannot keep his mind composed; until finally, he says, he sits down exhausted from the mental anguish of it all. And then, **then**, the still small voice creeps in, and he hears God in it, and God says:

The ends of the earth shall enquire after thy name and fools shall have thee in derision, and hell shall rage against thee while the pure in heart and the wise and the noble and the virtuous shall seek counsel and authority and blessings constantly from under thy hand. And thy people shall never be turned against thee by the testimony of traitors.
(D&C 122:1-3; see also T&C 139:7)

Why would the wise, the noble, the virtuous—why would they want blessings from under the hand of Joseph Smith if Joseph Smith is not himself a wise and noble and virtuous man? It makes no sense.

Well, I have read histories that have attacked Joseph Smith as one of the vilest characters that has ever lived, and they make a plausible case for that. And I have read histories that make Joseph out to be noble and virtuous (although in my estimation none of those adequately capture who he really was), and they make a plausible case. The problem is not that there isn't source material from which to write a positive or a negative history of Joseph Smith. The problem is that you can't reconcile them; they can't be the same man. You literally are forced to choose. When it comes to Joseph Smith, the blank canvas that Joseph Smith is that's standing in front of you, you have to pick up and color it. And whatever you color it with is more a reflection of **you** than it is of him.

I've reached the conclusion to color in Joseph Smith using the most wise, the most noble, and the most virtuous version that I can construct of the man—the man who helped write the denunciations of John C. Bennett, the man who removed the authority of Sampson Avard in

order to prevent Sampson Avard from going out and extracting vengeance that led to the Missouri conflict.

I choose to view Joseph as someone who **was** noble, who **was** a peacemaker, who, when the Missouri militia showed up, chose to have his people surrender their arms rather than to have open conflict. I choose to view Joseph as the one who surrendered the muskets and surrendered the cannons of the Nauvoo Legion, even though they outnumbered the United States Army at the time, rather than to have armed conflict. I choose to view Joseph as the one who said, *"I go as a lamb to the slaughter with a conscience void of any offense against my fellow man or of God"* (see D&C 135:4). I don't think an adulterer and a liar and a thief could have made such a statement. I choose to color the picture in of Joseph as what I believe him honestly to be: a man of extraordinary virtue.

Well, in that Joseph Smith History, he begins his account by talking about the religious conflict that existed at the time, that provoked him to go out and pray and try to get an answer about which church to join. And he makes this point after talking about the 'Lo here, Lo there, some going to the Methodists, some going to Presbyterian,' and he says:

It was seen that the seemingly good feelings of both the priests and the converts were more pretended than real; for a scene of great confusion and bad feeling ensued; priest contending against priest and convert against convert; so that all their good feelings one for another, if they ever had any, were entirely lost in a strife of words and a contest about opinions. (JSH 1:5-6; see also JSH 1:11)

Look, the legacy of Joseph Smith has been turned into over 80 different denominations that claim Joseph Smith as their founder. And if you don't think that Mormonism today—in the landscape, taking them all into account—aren't engaged in a strife of opinions with all of the seeming-good feelings one towards another entirely gone, then you aren't paying any attention to what these various sects are saying, claiming, and doing. The headquarters in Salt Lake City is a multi—multi—billion dollar organization. They have enough resources that they're about to develop a community in Florida that will have everything necessary for a half-a-million people to live in the community. It's a commercial development. They're not building it for members; they're building it as a real estate developer to sell to the public—a half-a-million-population community that will include streets and water tanks and utilities and schools; that will include business districts; that will include gas stations; that will include everything you need in order to have a community of half-a-million people living.

Audience Question: Where is that in Florida?

Denver: It's just outside Orlando. It's on a former cattle farm that they're now converting over to commercial development. It will pencil in, over the course of the development, in excess of a trillion dollar investment. A **trillion** dollar investment, 'kay?

Mormonism—The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—is a small subsidiary (admittedly, it's a tax-free subsidiary, but it's a small subsidiary) venture of the Corporation of the President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. They own Bonneville

Communications. They own universities. They own banking interests. They own a **lot** of real estate interests. And they have this tax-free subsidiary called the “Church”—and the only thing that’s required for them to do to maintain that is every six months provide some meaningful, uplifting talks in their general conferences and get the sustaining vote. And they get it automatically. But they’re becoming increasingly more vacuous.

Yes?

Audience: Sorry.

Denver: No, it’s fine.

Audience Question: A couple things: first, with Joseph Smith, you know, at Liberty Jail he says, I, Joseph Smith, Jr., you know—young Joseph, you’ll be the next prophet. Okay, so when I see that and know that he is a member, you know, of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, wouldn’t you say that if you resolved already about Joseph Smith, wouldn’t you say that this is the true church then, because Joseph Smith, Jr., you know, brought it up?

Denver: I think--I think all of us fall into the institutional trap. It’s that old game: Button, Button, Who’s Got the Button? Are you trying to determine who is it that has the prerogative? Who is it that has the right?

The Book of Mormon has a message about Christ. And the revelations through Joseph define the church—not in a corporate sense but in a believing sense. All who will repent and come unto Him are His church. Does that church necessarily have to have a hierarchy? Does it have to have structure? Does it have to have offices? Well, each one of the denominations contend and say, “You **have** to have... and **we’re it.**” The Book of Mormon and the revelations through Joseph Smith dial that back to: If you belong and support and fellowship in the Community of Christ (and I used to belong and can’t fellowship within the LDS Church), but you and I can agree on the fundamentals of the religion and agree on who Christ is and that salvation is through Christ alone—there’s no reason why you and I can’t have fellowship with one another. There’s no reason why we ought to be dividing ourselves.

Eighty different denominations. The most wealthy one has fairly little regard for the substance of the religion anymore. **All** of them have their pet causes, their hooks, what they claim: “This is why we are the best version of that.” But what if the best version of that doesn’t exist in an institutional way, with someone presiding over someone else? What if the best version of that consists of you and me viewing each other with equal dignity, equal care, equal concern, and that we can fellowship across any boundaries?

What if--What if I can offer baptism that reflects all of the Restoration, but the person that comes to me is Catholic, and their family’s Catholic, and their friends are Catholic; and they would like to continue to fellowship with the Catholics but they believe in the Restoration, and they believe in Joseph Smith, and they accept the Book of Mormon? Why can’t I baptize him or her, and let them fellowship with who they want to fellowship with, and rejoice that

both of us have found in each other a brother or sister in which we accept Joseph, we accept the Restoration, we accept the work of God?

Why does denominational differences occupy the center (instead of just the outer) periphery? Why isn't denominational affiliation largely superfluous? And what matters is understanding that God did a work through Joseph Smith, and it didn't get completed? It **did not** get completed. Much of what we argue over are the beginning stages of something that's supposed to develop into, ultimately, one heart, one mind, no poor among us. What if our denominations don't want there to be no poor among us? What if our denominations are interfering with our ability to be of one heart? What if they **purposefully** do not want us to be of one mind?

If you are the adversary, if you're the enemy, if what you fear above all else is the coming of Zion, what's the best way to hedge up the way and to prevent the coming of Zion? It's to make sure that all of the good feelings that people have towards one another are entirely lost in a contest of opinions and a strife of words, in which what separates us is far more important than accepting the things that matter, that are eternal, that are divine. How are we going to become of one heart and one mind if the only thing that's on our mind is our differences? How are we going to become of one heart if our hearts can never become united because, well, you accept that brand, and I don't, and there's something wrong with that brand?

Audience Question: So what is the attraction of the Mormon Church that brings so many of them in?

Denver: They have some bundle of truth. All of these Restoration groups, even—

You can take the most odious version of Restoration Mormonism Sectarianists, take the worst of the group—that's probably that "Warren Jeffs thing" that went on in Colorado City with the giving and taking of child brides. It's odious; it's repulsive. And yet, the Book of Mormon is a better teaching document to understanding Christ, and the universal nature of Christ, and the fact that Christ's post-resurrection ministered globally, than anything that we've got in the New Testament. The revelations through Joseph give us more information. I mentioned a while ago the Vision of the Three Degrees of Glory; it supplies greater answers. You take someone from out of that odious cult headed by Warren Jeffs and you let them sit through a Presbyterian meeting, and they're going to say, "My religion holds more, it gives me more truth, there's more substance to it." Even though there's a darkness to that cult, it still appeals. All of the Restoration denominations offer something that has value, and it's value above what you get merely from a New Testament church.

But the plan of the adversary is to stop the culmination of what the Restoration's intended to accomplish: unity. The Community of Christ does a far better job of giving lip service to unity than do probably any other of the various sects. But it's still the same problem; it's still exactly the same thing. You put a brand on you, and that brand is "I belong to this denomination," and you instantly feel like you need to be competitive.

Right now, the only church that I ever joined I got thrown out of. I was too candid, I was too honest, and they couldn't tolerate that. And the man who is the president of that organization, Russell Nelson, is the one that came to my stake with my membership records and gave them to a new stake president. He released my old one, and he called a new one. My old stake president defended me and refused to kick me out. He called a new one, handed him my membership records, and said, "The committee thinks this guy has to be disciplined."

And so, I'm un-churched. I am as committed a believer in the **Restoration**. I think I know as much or more than many of the Mormon historians that are regarded as **authorities** on Mormonism. I read every volume of the *Joseph Smith Papers* as they come into publication, and I make notes all over the margins. They are inconsistent in their storytelling. I pick out the problems. My notes and my version of the Joseph Smith volumes are flooded with notes that are correcting the problems that the Church historian's office makes as they put these things into print.

But, at the end of the day, what matters is not **who** can make the better argument. What matters isn't who can make the better historical claim. At the end of the day, what matters is **who** among **us** accepts the Restoration through Joseph Smith, accepts the Book of Mormon, accepts the teachings, and are willing to live them. And who among us is willing to fellowship with anyone else that they have a common belief in God's work currently underway. Because **that's** what matters. I went to Lamoni and talked, and I was happy to do that. I've come here during the general conference of the Community of Christ, and I'm happy to do that. I've been to Dallas to talk to Baptists. I've been to Atlanta.

Audience Question: So have you heard of the Baptist preacher that read the Book of Mormon, yes?

Denver: Yes.

Audience Comment: I think he's started a movement of where it's every sect, you know, come together with the Book of Mormon.

[crosstalk]

Denver: That's Lynn Ridenhour, yeah.

Audience Comment: Sidney Rigdon did that type of conversion; brought his whole church on.

Denver: Yeah, he did.

Well, look, one of the problems with the history writing of Joseph Smith that happened is that there are villains in the story of Joseph. There are a number of villains. Some of those villains figured out that they could take the villainy that they were accused of and they could ascribe it to Joseph and to make **him** the responsible party for what they were up to. When Joseph was confined in jail and they were going through the preliminary hearing— the

preliminary hearing's purpose is only to determine if there's a plausible case that can be made against him for treason. Witness after witness after witness failed to make out a plausible case, and Joseph Smith was likely to be released because there wasn't a good enough case to hold him on the charge of treason in Missouri—until one of the disaffected Mormons not only stepped forward, but came to the courthouse to testify. And it was because of the villainy that that man had been up to (that he said Joseph Smith was the author of) that Joseph was ultimately able to be held to stand trial on the charge of treason. Well, the state of Missouri lost their stomach for that, and they let Joseph escape, and he never was tried. But that allowed them later to make trumped up charges that said he evaded prosecution, and so they tried to get him back in Missouri in the 1842/3/4 time frame.

The same thing happened with John C. Bennett, the mayor of Nauvoo. When he got caught with his philandering, John Bennett did exactly the same thing. He attributed his villainy, his sexual improprieties, to Joseph Smith. He said, "Joseph. I learned this from Joseph." And so you get people who themselves are guilty of wrongdoing, improprieties, and villainy saying that it's not their sins; they learned this from Joseph—and Joseph is the sinner.

Again, it's the same thing—Joseph would be both good and evil spoken of. And you can find villains that say, "No, no, I'm not the real villain; he is. Blame him for what I've done."

Audience Comment: The Laws and the Higbees did that when the *Expositor* was...

Denver: In fact, one of the reasons why Law was not sealed to his wife by Joseph was because he was an adulterer. And so, when Law got his ambition (to have the sealing) turned down, Law accused Joseph of what Law was up to. It's the same thing over and over again.

I left my cell phone at home. I was planning to do and bring some things with me including—

I have written a book, and I was going to bring copies to hand out to anyone that said they'd read it. I've written a book about Joseph Smith called *A Man Without Doubt*. In *A Man Without Doubt*, I take three things—three of the longest things that Joseph Smith ever wrote—and I lay out a background, a history, a context for why the document got written, and then simply give you Joseph's document to read: the Joseph Smith History, the Lectures on Faith, and the letter from Liberty Jail. But I give you a context beforehand so that you can see the history. What were all the circumstances that were going on? What was happening at the moment that led to Joseph writing the document? And then I get out of the way, and I let Joseph speak. Joseph writes things of surpassing, heavenly value. You can't take a corrupt heart and produce the beauty and the light that Joseph Smith produced, that he called down from heaven; can't be done.

Audience Question: Last question. So then what is your purpose in having these meetings, like you've been to Lamoni, you're here, so what...?

Denver: Well one of the observations that— I've been kicked out, and I'm un-churched. The couple who have spoken before me, the Bartells, are actually now affiliated with the Community of Christ. One of the things that I have seen and learned from them and from

others—I have seen it in the LDS Church; I’ve heard about it in the Community of Christ—is that Joseph Smith is occupying an increasingly lower estimation in the eyes of **all** the Restoration people.

Audience Question: So that’s what you share, your belief of Joseph Smith, and that he was the man that...

Denver: Joseph Smith was everything that he said he was, and he was probably much more; his tendency to understate when he described things, his tendency to be hesitant to step out of that role of the meek teacher, his hesitancy to call down glory on himself.

One of the things that has become apparent to me is that Emma Smith was a stronger personality than Joseph Smith, and Joseph deferred to her. Joseph viewed her advice and counsel with extraordinary respect and seriousness. The caricature that some people turn Joseph Smith into is mirrored by the caricature that they turn Emma Smith into. Emma’s not even recognizable in the stories that you get from the Utah community; it’s a distortion.

I would like to see everyone who believes in the Restoration say, “Let’s stop picking fights. Let’s try to get down to the highest, the most noble, the most virtuous, the most wise view of what the Restoration was, and where it was headed, so that we, perhaps, stand a chance of, at some point, having one heart, one mind, and coming together in a way that would allow us to have no poor among us.” Because if we’re waiting on the denominations to do that, it will never happen. It will **never** happen. The institutional self-interests will not permit it.

I see within the Community of Christ a drift that is trying to accommodate and obtain popularity from the world. They want to fit in, within the current cultural and political climate. That same thing is taking place in the Salt Lake church. The ones that are trying hardest to hold the line against accommodating the world are the most virulent forms of Mormonism—they’re militant; they’re isolated; they’re polygamist. They’re an aberrant form of the Restoration, and they’re ugly. The ones that are succeeding are destroying the Restoration because they want to hold on and to grab more success.

If you and I don’t rise up above this clamor, if you and I don’t find common fellowship and value—in the words of the Book of Mormon, in the revelations through Joseph, in the things that we were bequeathed as our common inheritance—and forget about what separates us and try to find unity, if we don’t do that, it’s not going to happen. **Won’t**.

Yes?

Audience Comment: The Community of Christ sponsors the John Whitmer Historical Association. And a few decades back there was the Community of Christ, there was the RLDS version of it, and then there was the LDS version of it—and different groups have their version of history. But over the last few decades, I guess, there has been an intentional effort to...

Denver: Bridge the gap.

Audience Comment continues: We accept everyone, from wherever you are coming from—whether you came from here and moved over there, or came from there and moved over here. We accept all who want to study this history together, and let's find out what we can, warts and all.

Denver: That's true, but the needle...

Audience Comment continues: There has been an effort to...

Denver: The needle on polygamy has moved to the version Brigham Young and his affiants gave. And the Community of Christ is now more or less conceding that Joseph Smith was the author of some things that, **I still believe**, there's not an adequate historical record to pin upon Joseph.

[crosstalk]

Audience Comment continues: We need to get involved in that...

Audience Comment: Not everybody is following this.

Audience Comment continues: Well, I felt like Joseph Smith was a true, divine prophet. He came along... But with the rise of power and prestige, I mean, Nauvoo was bigger than Chicago in its day. [Denver: Yeah, it was.] And so, all of these people that were clamoring to make a fortune, and that type of thing, and had their own villainy—as you put it—kind of led us a little bit off the track in that really short, whatever, fourteen years' time. [Denver: Yeah, it was. Yeah.] And so, when Brigham Young, who actually, when they had trouble in Missouri, he organized all of the people to move over to Nauvoo. So, he was already seen as an apostle that was an organizer/leader and took them over there. So, when Joseph was killed, he took the role again of taking us out of danger and moving everybody out to Utah. So, that's why he had the rise and popularity when Joseph was in jail and other places.

Denver: But he also didn't—he didn't claim that he was going to run the show. He was saying that he would be a caretaker, and that Joseph Smith III would ultimately (or sons of Joseph would ultimately) come and assume their position. He was an incremental grabber of power. He was not an abrupt one.

Audience Comment continues: Why did Brigham Young or one of his top people... I think one of them gave Joseph Smith III a knife that missed, like a switchblade that didn't work right. Another one gave him a gun that didn't fire right—I hope there's no bad thing that happened to the young boy. But when he went out to Utah, there may have been that intention, that he was a caretaker, but it translated into them just taking over. Whereas the majority of the church, I heard 115 splinters, you know, people claiming leadership when Joseph died...

[crosstalk]

Audience Question: Wasn't Brigham Young the president of the Twelve, council...?

Audience Comment: He was at the time, and that's why he had his club.

Audience Comment: He wasn't such a peacemaker out there in Utah, either.

Denver: Oh, no, no, no. He wasn't.

[Crosstalk]

Audience Comment: They went out there thinking that they would find the true church—whatever you want to determine that to be—the true church, and had to leave during the night on their own, however you want to say it. It was dangerous.

Denver: Just one point that I want to clarify. At the time that Joseph Smith died, you had Sidney Rigdon (who was back in Philadelphia) who was one claimant. You had James Strang (who was up in the timber mission in Wisconsin) who was one claimant. You had William McClellan (who was down in Texas)—Joseph had sent him down to Texas, presumably, to find a place to go to, and he just never left; and he was a member of the Twelve, and he stayed a member of the Twelve for quite some time, until they finally got around to throwing him out. And there was Brigham Young. And Emma Smith was solicited by all of the various claimants to come. But those were the five main at the time; and Emma stayed behind, refusing to fall in line with any of them.

Audience Comment continues: And maybe they moved away to be a little bit safe for a little while, because her husband was killed. But they all wanted, ultimately, the seed of Joseph to lead them forward. That was the thing. And they all came back when young Joseph was a little older, and solicited for him to be **their** leader because that would give them the ultimate...

Denver: During the, what was called the Mormon Reformation at the—

Brigham Young and the leadership of the Church were running out of time. Brigham Young and the leadership of the Church took the position that the reason they were having droughts, the reason why all the cattle got killed in the hard winter and they were starving, the reason why the elements were treating them so poorly was because God was mad. And God was mad because the members weren't faithful. And so, he began a program called the Home Missionary Program, in which there was a list of questions that home missionaries were supposed to go around and interview people. The purpose of that list of questions was to find out if you were doing something that was unforgivable, that required your blood to be spilled on the ground through blood atonement, because Brigham Young instituted, literally, a reign of terror.

When Johnston's Army came out to Utah, the people who were resident in Utah viewed that, among some quarters, as liberation. The spring following Johnston's Army's arrival in Utah,

there were over 3,400 people that left to go back east. They have records of that because the—or they know the numbers on that because the migration to the east occurred in wagon trains and other supervised exits that they kept numbers on. But there was likely an even larger number than that, that evacuated out to California, going west to escape the kingdom of Brigham Young.

I wrote a paper called "*Brigham Young's Telestial Kingdom*," that I presented at the Sunstone Symposium. I've got a website. It's on a page called "Downloads"—there's a bunch of papers I've written. One of them is "*Brigham Young's Telestial Kingdom*." denversnuffer.com.

Audience Question: Do you have a business card?

Denver: I don't have it.

Audience Question: Well, is there something on the bottom of your flier?

Denver: Is it?

[crosstalk about the information]

Audience Comment: Brigham Young was not so very nice to Emma either.

Denver: Oh, no, no, no! He called her a wicked, wicked, wicked woman! He said that Joseph once said he'd go to hell to be with Emma, and if he wants to be with Emma, that's exactly where he's going to have to go. Brigham Young and Emma Smith...

Audience Comment: He was not nice to her.

Audience Comment: They didn't get along.

Denver: They did not get along. If Brigham had persuaded her to go west, he would've required her to marry him.

Audience Comment: Well, anything that had Joseph Smith's name on it, Brigham tried to take from the, you know, he tried to take back. Well, there was some things that I think Emma got out of all of that because she had kids to support.

Denver: Yes, she was able to get **some** property transfers. Joseph Smith had a pending petition for bankruptcy when he died because of all of the losses that they'd suffered in Missouri. Emma Smith got a number of assets transferred to her before Joseph filed for bankruptcy—to engage in some asset protection before that. And Emma was able, because of the transfers to her, to hold onto some of the property; which is why she was able to relocate back to Nauvoo. She owned a lot of property in Nauvoo.

Audience Comment: She didn't give up the Mansion House.

Denver: She did not. Listen, thank you for coming out. It was wonderful to spend some time with ya, and I hope it was useful. Thank you.