

Podcast Episode 89: Interview with Denver, Part 2

This is the second part of Shawn McCraney's interview of Denver Snuffer, which was recorded on October 8th, 2019, in front of a live audience.

Shawn: Denver Snuffer. Last week we heard about your life in story form. It was a great prose, it was narrative; it flowed from one interesting tale to another and brought us to the point where he was baptized in September of... '72?

Denver: '73.

Shawn: '73. East Coast, Atlantic Ocean.

Denver: Atlantic Ocean.

Shawn: What I want to do on this part, if we can, is I'm going to try to— When you interview someone you don't know, you learn how to approach that person in the second part and third part, and so I'm going to kind of move us along at a pace where we can get to more information because we've got a lot to cover.

Denver: We do!

Shawn: We do. All right, so you were baptized. Tell us about how long it was until you met your wife, and what you did between that time.

Denver: Well, one of the differences after baptism was— Where before, reading scripture had very little appeal or connection to me, after baptism the scriptures came alive to me. It seemed to me that what the New Testament was talking about as history...

Shawn: I want to ask you again about your wife, though.

Denver: ...was living.

Shawn: You're not answering—you know you're not answering.

Denver: No, no...

Shawn: We need to keep this thing so people will watch it.

Denver: These two go together.

Shawn: I know, but...

Denver: My zeal...

Shawn: Yeah...

Denver: My zeal turned me into a golden-contact-generation facilitator for the missionaries. Where the entire New England States mission had been relatively dead, I had the missionaries teaching *everyone*. I had dozens of people who they were teaching. *And* they were baptizing. And one of the people that I got interested in the church, interested enough to ultimately be baptized, was a gal that I wound up later marrying.

Shawn: Yes!!

Denver: I baptized her.

Shawn: Excellent!!

Denver: Yeah.

Shawn: That is a beautiful story!

Denver: She's not my present wife.

Shawn: Oh, dang it!!

Denver: Yeah.

Shawn: Come on, man! Okay. No, it's okay.

Denver: So, yeah.

Shawn: So, you've been married twice?

Denver: Yes. She subsequently divorced me and left the church.

Shawn: Okay.

Denver: Yeah, left me.

Shawn: So she never had the truth?

Denver: Well...

Shawn: I'm just kidding.

Denver: Yeah, but I baptized her. I got orders transferring me to Texas, away from New Hampshire, and I knew that if I left— She's my, you know, my product, my conversion

evidence. And about that time Spencer Kimball gave a talk that said any two people can be married if they'll live the gospel. So really, it doesn't matter who the hell you marry if you live the gospel. That was bad advice, but I took it in my zeal.

I got a fellow who was Jewish to join the church. I got a number of people, that subsequently I stayed in contact with, to join the church. The ward in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, visibly grew as a result of the zeal. I was obnoxious. I was just **on fire!**

Shawn: But we know that early converts to *any* group are always the ones they put in for recruitment because you're most on fire, and so that's normal.

Denver: It is.

Shawn: We get that, right? So, move us along. You got married, you got divorced—quote, within a 'short period of time?'

Denver: Yeah. I wound up in Texas. We had our first daughter in Texas. We had two daughters, two sons. And she ultimately— After law school, she divorced me and she left the church—and I had four kids. I married my current wife. She and I have had five more children.

Shawn: Wow!

Denver: But she raised nine, so...

Shawn: Wow!

Denver: So yeah, she's the mother of nine. She grew up in the LDS Church and lived in Sandy—grew up in the town we currently live in.

Shawn: You're kidding?

Denver: Yeah.

Shawn: Nine kids.

Denver: Yeah!

Shawn: So when you met—what's her first name?

Denver: Stephanie.

Shawn: Stephanie.

Denver: Yeah.

Shawn: When you met Stephanie, your oldest child was how old?

Denver: Oh, see *now* you're requiring me to remember things that only mothers...

Shawn: You're remembering the name of guys in bars who said hello to you!

Denver: But ages?!

Shawn: Okay.

Denver: Ages?!!

Shawn: All right, around...

Denver: Really!

Shawn: Around— Were they still in high school?

Denver: Yeah. She was she was in junior high and she was the oldest. And then the youngest was Benjamin. He was in kindergarten.

Shawn: How'd you meet Stephanie?

Denver: She had worked at my law office. We were growing and we were hiring. And there was an office management class that was taught in the local— It was a high school program, but they drew students from a variety of high schools and she was one of the hires from that program. Another hire out of that program is still working for me—Lisa. She came in and has been with me for like— I've been practicing law 38 years, and I think about 35 of those I've had Lisa with me. Anyway, Stephanie was a University of Utah student. She was a year away from graduating, and she'd been talking about going on an LDS mission when she graduated. One of the jokes was that she had had 1,500 first dates, but she didn't have a second date. She rather intimidated...

Shawn: Oh, wow!

Denver: ...boys.

Shawn: But not men.

Denver: But she didn't intimidate me. Anyway, I found myself divorced. She invited me to a Thanksgiving dinner with her family, took pity on me. You know, that was nice. She was the only person I had known for *years*. And dating after divorce is a— It's all phony. I mean whoever you're...

Shawn: Dating's all phony from *any* age.

Denver: Yeah, but they're going to put on something...

Shawn: But you can start at 13!!!

Denver: Yeah, well, there's that. But...

Shawn: It's the same game!!

Denver: She'd been at the office for three/three-and-a-half years at the time.

Shawn: Yeah.

Denver: And so I knew her. I knew her on a good day, I knew her on a bad day. And why not date someone you know instead of dating someone that's going to, you know, do their best to fool you.

Shawn: It sounds like you got a gem.

Denver: Yeah.

Shawn: Any woman who would take on four kids, raise them, and then another five...

Denver: Yes.

Shawn: Hats off!

Denver: Yeah, yeah.

Shawn: Great! Fantastic! I should be interviewing Stephanie too.

Denver: She would be a better candidate for a whole lot of reasons.

Shawn: So you raised your nine children. You're an appellate attorney. Is that...

Denver: I just finished arguing before the Tenth Circuit, but I do trial work as well.

Shawn: Okay.

Denver: Yeah.

Shawn: So, and you're raising them. Does she work with you while raising the kids? Are you active in the ward? What jobs are you holding?

Denver: Well, okay, there's that. You know I'm not Mormon *now*.

Shawn: Yeah, I know.

Denver: Yeah, okay.

Shawn: But you were when you married Stephanie.

Denver: I was.

Shawn: And she was too.

Denver: And we got married in the Salt Lake Temple.

Shawn: Salt Lake Temple.

Denver: Yes, yes!

Shawn: Did you have the four kids sealed to you?

Denver: They were sealed to me from the prior, you know...

Shawn: Right.

Denver: No reason to have them sealed to her that we could think of. I suppose there was a time when we could have done that. I can't get in a temple these days.

Shawn: Yeah, yeah. I bet.

Denver: Persona non grata.

Shawn: Yeah. So, you're raising the family. How was— Were you active, you and Stephanie? Are you going to the temple monthly, or quarterly, or like that?

Denver: Yeah, we were. We were active, faithful. I think I was a hundred percent home teacher for the last 15 years of membership. I taught gospel doctrine. I was a ward mission leader in Sandy, Utah, which is tantamount to a do-nothing job because no one joins the church in Sandy, Utah. They made me the ward mission leader, and for the first time in seven years, they had baptisms while I was on that assignment.

Shawn: So your zeal continued on?

Denver: Well, I'm not sure that it was— It was contemplative. If you're going to believe in a faith, then that faith ought to be as carefully and continuously examined as you can. I taught gospel doctrine for about 25 years. I never taught the same lesson twice. I wanted to get

into the material deeper, each time that you go round. And so the lesson that I would teach—the fourth time you go through the material—was considerably more in-depth than what it was taught, you know, four cycles earlier when you were going through that material. To me, it was always a matter of trying to understand more deeply, more profoundly, more carefully. And in that regard, you need to be willing to find things that you don't want to find. You need to confront things that you don't want to confront.

The exploration into Mormonism has been exhilarating and disappointing, challenging and reassuring. It's been a bundle of conflicts, and it's been marvelous throughout. And I enjoyed immensely the entire time that I was active in the church. I was *thrown* out; I didn't leave voluntarily. The current president of the LDS Church came to my stake and called a new stake president—because the old one defended me—called a new stake president, handed him my membership records, and said, “This man needs to be dealt with. The committee's decided that this man needs to be dealt with.”

Shawn: Before you go forward on that, Denver, take us back to the one of the— Give us a main thing, for our audience who doesn't know you, of one of those things that was difficult to find in the constant teaching, and searching, and preparing that you were doing—one of the first things that was really brutal to see the reality of it, and you said, “Wait a second.”

Denver: There are a number of them. There was a disconnect, across the board, at the end of the life of Joseph Smith and then when the election was held in Winter Quarters in December of '47. There was a disconnect between those. When I became a Mormon, I read everything I could get my hands on—all the biographies, all of the histories, everything there was from early church history, everything B.H. Roberts put out there, all of the biographies.

I had a command of Mormon history—in the way that the church presented its history and the apologists presented the history. But D. Michael Quinn wrote about early Mormon history in a way that was, to me, heretical and contradictory. He was telling a different narrative than the narrative that the church was telling, and he made me mad. But because I was always searching, I read his book. And then I looked at his bibliography and his footnotes. And then I searched to find the source material to try and show, to myself, why Michael Quinn was being *unfair* and *biased* in the way he was presenting this material. That he was not— He was a critic, he was not a historian; *this is unfair*. But the more I looked, the more I found I agreed with what Michael Quinn was saying and the more problematic the orthodox histories were. And I have taken some of those issues farther than I think Michael Quinn has taken the issues, and so he and I have some disagreements about things that I probably have disagreements with most Mormons about. I just did not think that the church was truthful. For a whole lot of reasons, the church was not being truthful about its history. Now understand, I'm not trying to rock anyone's boat.

Shawn: Yeah.

Denver: I'm not trying to say, "Hey, let me come bitch-slap you because you ain't right and I am!" That was not my objective. I had approached, I took— We rented a motorhome. We went back to the Nauvoo temple dedication—well, it was the open house. We didn't stay for the dedication. You had to have tickets for that and I didn't have the pull to get them. We went back—rented a motorhome, took my kids, we parked on, is it Mulberry? The Main Street there? Mulholland. We parked on Mulholland, and one of the evangelical folks had rented a shop and they were giving out anti-Mormon stuff in the shop on Main Street. And I sent my kids in and I said, "You kids go in and you get every bit of anti-Mormon stuff you can find in there, and and bring it in here in the motorhome." So they went in and they harvested what they could. They brought it back, and I said, "You go through all this stuff, each one of ya, and you find where they've made mistakes. And if you can't find they've made a mistake, bring it to my attention and I'll go over it." Because I wanted them to see.

We drove down as a family during General Conference, to drive through and look at the signs of the protesters during General Conference. You grew up in Utah; you're insulated. I joined the church in New Hampshire. I believed, in Texas that was another— There's a lot of stories out of Texas about Mormons and how we interface down there. I *wanted* my kids to encounter the opposition, the push back, because if you've got a faith that you haven't examined— I would rather have a child awaken to some truths and depart from the faith, at least temporarily, and come back to it, than I would have a kid that simply salutes and says, "Yes, sir!" to an unexamined faith. And so I wanted them— I want to struggle with it; I want them to struggle with it.

So, as an aid— I have one son who went on a mission. The one son who went on a mission came home from his mission and fell away from the church. And I wrote a book that was designed to help him understand the value of the faith that he'd been raised in, as an exercise in pure, religious devotion as opposed to respect for an institution. In some respects, you have to destroy the respect for the institution in order to penetrate to the level where there's value, there's truth, there's holiness. And so I wrote a book that was intended to heal the broken Mormon heart, and to allow them to say, "Yeah, there's problems in this institution, but there's no reason to throw away those things of value, and truth, and goodness that you can find within it." So, the book was written primarily for a struggling son, and then for whomever else there may be out there that could benefit from it.

Shawn: What's the name of the book?

Denver: *Passing the Heavenly Gift*.

Shawn: I think I've seen it. Was that part of the reason Nelson said...

Denver: Yes, that was *the* reason I got kicked out. They wanted that book suppressed; they wanted it taken off the market. Well, the book percolated for a bit and it had an effect on my son—it was very positive. It also had an effect on those who were troubled that was very positive.

The stake president, who was given the assignment to get rid of me, took that book and gave it to 20— He bought 20 copies and he gave it to 20 men inside our stake, none of whom were at all an appropriate audience to read that thing. None of them knows there are problems in Mormon history. They're just going along fat, dumb, and happy with whatever's being dispensed each Sunday. And to find out that there's trouble in paradise, I mean, it shook them to the core. And so these people, unprepared to hear anything about this, are given a book that's shaking to the core. And they find out about murders, and they find out about deceit, and they found out about treachery, and they find out about dishonesty, and they find out about lies. They find out about things that you will only find if you go search for it, or if you happen to wind up in a position where someone's trying to proselytize you away and they want to present you the problem; so now it's dumped in your lap. None of these were candidates for that book. All of them read and all of them came back with the same consensus, "Oh, this book is horrible. Oh, this is terrible."

Well yeah, if you think that what you're getting is pure and undefiled, that book will upset you. But if you think what you've got is something you're prepared to walk away from and abandon, because you feel betrayed, that book will help you. It will provide you with a way to have faith in spite of failure, to have hope in spite of setback.

Brigham Young turned Utah Mormonism into a trap. It was a horrible period of time. The Mormon Reformation and the Home Missionary Program was literally designed to determine whether or not the church should kill you. Brigham Young did not believe that the failure was at the leadership level, he believed the failure was at the rank and file. And that the reason all of the cattle died when they took them to Cache County, and the winter was so bad, was because the members were sinning. And as a consequence of the members sinning, God had punished them by destroying the cattle. It never occurred to him that maybe his leadership was flawed. He never questioned that. I think Brigham Young had a mental breakdown when the 'Battle Axe of the Lord' didn't respond to Johnston's Army, and he was actually dispossessed to the governorship.

I presented a paper on that, and I did that at Sunstone; and one of those papers I presented at Sunstone is in a book called *Eight Essays*. I just want to make sure... no... "Other Sheep Indeed," no... it's not it. It's called "Brigham Young's Telestial Kingdom." It's not in this book of essays, but I brought you this book that includes several of my Sunstone presentations and a couple of other things that I've written. Chapter 8, which is the eighth essay in this book, is called "Problems in Restoration History." And I brought you three books.

Shawn: Thank you.

Denver: This one is a series of essays that has been recently published, gathering together things I've written over the years.

This one's called *A Man Without Doubt*. *A Man Without Doubt* presents three failures that Joseph Smith confronted. And in response to each of the three (he wrote his lengthiest three efforts to try and help people), I give an introduction and a set up to describe why the document got written, and then I get out of the way and let Joseph talk. And it goes to show that Joseph Smith's biggest nemesis were his own followers.

And then this book is called *Come Let Us Adore Him*. The cover of this book is a sketch by Leonardo Da Vinci, incomplete, but a drawing that he made of the Nativity. And I thought, "What a perfect cover," because this book is an incomplete sketch of the Savior. But you can tell the subject matter of the Nativity from what Da Vinci *had* done, and you can make it out in rough form. I took, in *Come Let Us Adore Him* (a book that was written while I was still an active member), and I selected from the life of the Savior those incidents in the Gospels that have never been adequately addressed, in order to understand the personality of the Lord—the ministry of the Lord, the meaning of things that he had done. And so while it is incomplete, it really does—in my attempt—try to introduce the Lord to people in a way that that makes Him seem a far more resilient, far more firm minded, far more authentic character, that really did respond to the burden of prophecy and fulfilling the burden of prophecy.

I got into a lot of trouble because I tried to deal honestly with problems in Mormonism. I know that there are people who want to dismiss Mormonism altogether, for a whole host of reasons. But there are people that want to dismiss evangelical Christianity, Catholicism, Islam. What I found is that if you take all of the the disagreements, the level at which we argue back and forth about issues, and you say, "Okay, that exists and that's true enough," *but* what is it when evangelical Christianity approaches the idea of holiness, of goodness, of God and man's relation to one another? What is it that evangelical Christianity has to offer that is the highest, and best, and most pure, and most desirable? What you'll find is that in Catholicism—what is highest, most noble, what is best, what is most desirable—and in evangelical Christianity, it's the same. The same is true of Mormonism, and the same is even true of the deepest Islamic thinkers. In fact, at its highest level in the search for light and truth and goodness, you can find it in the Bhagavad Gita. You can find it in Buddhism.

Shawn: And what is it? What's that common thread?

Denver: Christ said to His disciples—and it was in a harrowing moment: He had just announced that one of them was going to betray Him, and He had just sent Judas on his task. And in *that* moment, before He goes out in the Garden to suffer, He says, "By this shall men know that you are my disciples, that you have love for one another." Okay? So, is it an act of love for me to search for and to find the things that I can agree with and that I treasure, that *you* believe in and that *you* treasure? Is it an act of love for me to come and argue and denounce?

I understand that people defend the idea that by denouncing, we're really helping to save because we need to rebuke them. But Christ's interface with the critics that *He* had was almost uniformly tolerant, and benign, kindly, and attempting to get them to see something

higher and better—right up until *He* chose the moment (I defend that in this book, that Christ chose the moment) for His sacrifice. He went in to cause, at the Passover, the sacrifice of the Paschal Lamb by His “Woe unto you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!” by comparing them to whited sepulchers. He went in and He controlled the moment of sacrifice because it was necessary that the Paschal Lamb be slain on the Passover.

And so, His provocation controlled timing. But up until the moment of the provocation, you know, we found someone that was taken in adultery. Well, He doesn't deal with that other than in a kindly way, to force them to look into their own conscience. And looking into their own conscience, they back down. Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar? Well, show me a coin. Whose image is on this coin? Well, give to Caesar the things that belong to Caesar, and give to God the things that belong to God. Those are not the words of a hostile, street-preaching evangelical with a fist in your face, those are the words of someone that actually is trying, in a loving and kindly way, to reclaim someone from from error.

And I love to be corrected from error, but many times people trying to correct me have not done the work I've done. I would venture to say, if anyone has written or read a history of Mormonism that was written before 2010, they're way behind in understanding what the current state of Mormon history is. Most people read and rely on second and third-hand sources. I have devoted the last decades to looking for original journals, original diaries, original content, contemporaneous newspaper accounts; searching for the source material.

Historians write fiction. They try to smooth over the events to try and make a narrative, to try and give you the moral of the story. When lives are lived without a storyline, they're lived without the plot being developed. They set out to achieve something headed in this direction, and that's their goal. But through a bunch of missteps, misfortunes, oppositions, failures, they wind up over there. So the historian comes along and says, “Here's the story of their glorious trip there,” when the life that was lived was frustrated; it was hedged up. They lived their lives with blinders on, stumbling through circumstance-and-predicament after circumstance-and-predicament. And to ignore the reality of what they went through is to ignore what, really, the lessons are.

I suggested in a talk I gave a couple weeks ago at a conference that people read the account in Exodus and only look at Moses' words. Just read what Moses says—ignore the rest of the story and isolate what Moses has to say. This is a man overwhelmed, intimidated, frightened—judging his own inadequacy, protesting to God about his unfitness, his unsuitability—about the difficulty of the challenge; about his own reluctance. *That's life*. The problem is we pick up the scriptures and we do to the scriptures exactly what has been done to Mormon history.

When you and I talked about doing this interview, I said, “I think every Christian should study Mormon history, every Christian should get deep into Mormon history.” Because they'll realize there's an institution, a *trillion*-dollar institution—a political powerhouse, an economic engine, a social force in the entire world—sitting here, built upon a whole bunch of misrepresentations, falsehoods, and skewing of the events. If you were to study carefully

the content, in order to be able to see the difference of that, a Christian (if they're being fair) would then have the problem of going back, and saying, "What might I learn, if I had available to me the source material to do the same thing to the evolution of the Christian Church? And how might I reconsider, a little more humbly, my own dogmatism about my state?"

And if you're Jewish and you go back to the period of Ezra and Nehemiah—the incidents immediately preceding the Babylonian captivity, the discovery of the scroll, the reading of the law—what you realize is that Judaism was in tatters at the end of the first temple period, and it got rebuilt and reconstructed. And it doesn't matter, *it doesn't matter* how many of the scholars' tools get applied to try and ferret out, from the clues that we have left, the content of the the old canon and the veracity of the new canon. The fact is you can't do with those what I am able to do with Mormon history because I have far more available, first-hand resources from which to conduct my reconstruction of the Mormon experience. But by analogy, every lesson you learn along that reconstructive effort should lead to the humble acceptance of the fact that the form of Christianity currently believed, by the entire Protestant world, *did not exist* in any form for 1,500 years. It's an invention, a relatively recent one, that is the fruit of the effort that was made by Martin Luther in putting his life on the line to rebel. And ultimately, much of evangelical Christianity is the product of that founder, Roger Williams of Rhode Island.

But in Mormonism, I have the ability to look and see where the fingerprints are. I still have access to source material from which I can actually say, "I know what's going on down there is based on myth and dishonesty." And I can somewhat reconstruct a more accurate version, and vision of what it began as, from the available source material.

I've got the Ante-Nicene and Pre-Nicene fathers' works; they're a valuable resource. We've got the lectures that were done by Martin Luther; we know what drove him. We don't have access to the papal archives; we don't know what they have suppressed. We do know that there were early teachings that divided, at about 1,000 A.D., the Eastern Orthodox from the Catholic world; and that they represent a preservation, in part, on the eastern side, the things that were neglected and lost on the western side, and vice versa. But we come onto the scene at a point in history in which it's *arrogant* to say, "I can tell you what pure Christianity looks and feels like," because we've come so late to the party.

The one thing I can know for certain is that one of the evidences of actual Christianity is the *love* that people can have for one another, across *all* the rubble, across *all* the ruin, across *all* the disagreements. And if we can begin with the highest, most noble aspirations of loving and caring for one another— Christ chose, deliberately, a character that would be considered odious in the Good Samaritan. He was not only odious socially and politically, in the story he would have been odious economically. And here you've got someone that the Jews had this religious disconnect, and yet, the one who helped him overlooked his Samaritanism, overlooked his predicament.

“What was he doing on the road if... He should have been smart enough to travel in a pack... He should never... It's his own fault to fall among thieves! He's a foolish man, he got what he deserved!” There's none of that. There's no, “You're a foolish man, you shouldn't be Jehovah's Witness!” “You're a foolish man, you shouldn't be Catholic!” “The ministry and Catholicism has turned into rampant pedophilia: you should be *anything but* Catholic!” “How can you be *that?!?*”

Why am I trying to inflict pain upon a Catholic who's doing his best to hold on to his faith, instead of inspiring him to look for something noble and good and virtuous that's exemplified in his faith—like praising Mother Teresa, and saying, “She deserves the sainthood that your church is going to visit upon her?”—because *he* exemplifies the kind of human caring for one another that Christ came to deliver. *And* Saint Francis, I mean the current Pope—everything the current Pope is doing or not doing (notwithstanding, he chose a name for which I have abiding respect; and he earned my respect as a consequence).

Shawn: I could personally listen to you. And I understand why you have people who listen to you and follow, because you have a great perspective—which, I agree with everything you said. I have no problem.

Denver: No.

Shawn: The show is called *Heart of the Matter* and I need to get, for our audience, to the *heart* of what this all means. And you're a great teacher, and you're laying out principles here that are established in the history of Christianity and Mormonism. But what does that mean? Because on one hand, you're saying we're wasting our time poking on the Catholics, and this and that, but *you are* poking on the North Temple Mormons. You do go after *them*. So the love thing, it seems to be, apparently, somewhat lost between you and North Temple. And so I agree with you that, look, let's just let people believe what they're going to believe, let's point out the positives—all that you said—but what are you about now? What are you doing? What is happening? What's the threat? Why do they consider you a *threat*, besides the obvious?

Denver: Yeah. When I— Most of what I have written was written at a time that I was a faithful member of the church, therefore, most of what I've written reflects the viewpoint from inside faithful Mormonism.

Shawn: Can you tell our audience what you've written? I'm sorry to interrupt your thought.

Denver: The first...

Shawn: How many books?

Denver: Well, seventeen volumes of material, but in addition there's— They asked for, and I gave permission, to gather collected works of blog posts and other things. And so, there's

a number of those volumes that are... I think five of those, so if you count them, like 22 volumes.

Shawn: And how do people get those?

Denver: Oh, you can buy them on Amazon.

Shawn: Just look up Denver?

Denver: Yeah.

Shawn: Twenty-two volumes on Amazon.

Denver: Yeah, they're all there.

Shawn: All right.

Denver: The breach came when *Passing the Heavenly Gift* was written. Again, it was still written *inside* the Mormon world. It was *after that* (and I got kicked out) that I felt no need at all to pull punches, and so what was written after that— I've been asked, "Why don't you go back to that first book, *The Second Comforter* (which is the short name. The long name is *The Second Comforter: Conversing with the Lord Through the Veil*—which as a former Mormon should should mean something to you)."

Shawn: It rings a bell.

Denver: It rings a bell. Or at least three knocks. (Audience laughter.)

So *that* book was written to try and inspire people to seek for, and obtain for themselves, revelation. Look, the Joseph Smith story, the Book of Mormon, the testimonies of the missionaries— When I came into Mormonism, I thought all those good people were visited by angels and experiencing miracles; and my expectation was that that was commonplace. I thought that's what Mormonism was: it was a revival of the original New Testament religion with all of the accouterments that occur in that New Testament religion.

Shawn: Road to Damascus. You're waiting for it.

Denver: The whole thing.

So, when it was within the first year of being baptized and the scriptures were opening before my mind, that having an angelic visit—which happened—I thought that was commonplace, that happened to everyone. That's, you know, that's what Mormonism is. It's, you know, the veil gets thin, you go through, they come through, you have fellowship on the other side.

It was really not until I got out of Texas to Utah, into the Brigham Young University Law School, that associating weekly with, you know, the hometown crop of Mormonism out of the mission field, that it began to dawn on me that extraordinary experiences were not expected—and actually weren't even welcomed. The miraculous was deferred to the hierarchy; and the hierarchy was responsible for dispensing that to you and me. And so, what *The Second Comforter* (the first book I wrote) was attempting to do was to testify and to suggest the miraculous—the thinness of the veil, the proximity of angels—needs to become commonplace in Mormonism.

Shawn: Let me stop, just for a second.

Denver: Yeah.

Shawn: You just dropped a *huge* bomb.

Denver: Oh.

Shawn: *Gigantic* bomb.

Denver: Which was?

Shawn: That you were visited by an angel. You went like *this* to respond to that.

Denver: Oh.

Shawn: *But*, maybe it's that to you, "Oh yeah, of course. I visit with them weekly, you know." *But*, to most people— That's not a reality for most people. I'm not saying it should or shouldn't be, I'm just saying most people don't seem to have that reality. So, can you explain a little bit about that? Or do you— Maybe what the North Temple guys say, "It's a little too sacred, I don't discuss that?"

Denver: No. I've never bought in to that idea. But there is an idea that I do buy into, and the idea is that Christ did a variety of miraculous things—always charging those to whom the miracle had been given to tell no one about it. There's another comment that He makes...

Shawn: But we know that was because He was, like you said, orchestrating His death, and had that...

Denver: He was, He was. But there's another comment that He makes, and I put these two together, not— (It's a long story why I put them together, but I put these two together), He says it is a wicked and an adulterous generation that seeks after a sign. I believe that the more you talk about the miraculous, the more you attract a certain personality. That is, in Paul's words, they have itching ears. They really want a tale; they really want the fantastic. When the burden of Christianity is the daily life, it's treating one another kindly; it's loving those that are in need; it's doing things for others. And so, I tend not to speak about the

miraculous, primarily because I don't want people that are eager for *only* the miraculous, because it's the wrong sort, and it's not the burden...

Shawn: But Denver, the first book you wrote is about...

Denver: Yes, the miraculous—in an effort to try and get others to experience it, not to boast of myself.

Shawn: Right. I know. I'm not finding you boastful, I just want to know...

Denver: But I'll tell you what happened in that first visit, because it really reflects poorly on me. And I have no problem telling the story because it shows what a poor candidate I am for doing any kind of work on an errand from God. I can still close my eyes and see everything about it. It made *that* indelible of an impression upon me at the time. I was caught up— I know that the scriptures speak using a phrase, 'I was caught up to an exceedingly high mountain.' I think I understand what that phrase means because I was, in fact, caught up. I could see the circle of the horizon of the earth in the distance.

Shawn: So you just crushed the flat-earthers right there!

Denver: Yeah. I could see, and I was standing on an actual surface.

Shawn: Okay.

Denver: And there were actual walls, and there were paintings on the walls, okay? And I'm taking this in. And there's a personage there. I could sketch him if you gave me— Well, I'm not going to do that. (I thought she was going to hand me a pen.)

Shawn: (He thought you were bringing him a pallet!)

Denver: Yeah, I could sketch him 'cause I can still picture him. Okay, he had a beard, he had hair, but it was not, like, long and flowing. It was reasonably well groomed, and, you know, not shoulder length but not collar length either—white hair, white beard, elderly, as somber a personage as you would ever encounter. And he said to me exactly this: "On the first day, of the third month, in nine years, your ministry will begin; and so, you must prepare."

Shawn: Wow.

Denver: That's exactly what he said. Okay, so, here's *my* attention span—I hear that and I think, "I wonder why the walls are transparent? Why would you have a wall if you can see right through the thing? And why are they painting? Don't they have photography? And why is it that I know *that* painting I'm looking at is Moses? Because I *know that face is the face of Moses!* And no one's ever shown me a picture, but that's Moses—and he's bald. I had

no idea Moses was bald. Because one of the criteria for the high priest— A defect included baldness. That's weird! And where are we?"

So, this is where *my* head is at, and I've just had an angel give me— I didn't ask, "Prepare? Wh...what? How? Mini...ministry? Wh...whaat?" And the man literally waited. He wasn't going to force anything. He had a message, he had the content, and he gave it to me. It was up to me then to inquire, and I didn't inquire. I'm acting like a tourist. It's only weeks later, I mean— Then I was dismissed, I mean, and as I was dismissed I noticed, as I departed, that there was someone arriving. And I thought, "Does heaven operate like, you know, a bus terminal where there are people coming and going all the time? 'Cause that's interesting." And I believe that as I departed, that the direction that someone arriving came from was earthward, and therefore, coming up.

But the whole thing was singular. I didn't talk about it, but I did write down an account of that. And it was only weeks later that it occurred to me that that was an opportunity to learn a whole lot, but I didn't ask a single question. In fact, I was so distracted that I didn't— I got out of it a message that I didn't understand, that deserved inquiry, that deserved *some* amplification, explanation, elucidation—*something* other than those words because I didn't know what to make of those words. And as I thought about it in the weeks that followed, all I had were questions. So when I had questions then I made it a matter of prayer—and I got nothing.

Shawn: We're out of time.

Denver: Yeah.

Shawn: Nine years, three months, first day of the third month...

Denver: Yeah.

Shawn: What date? What date—what is that, or what was that?

Denver: Oh, it's a good story, but we'll...

Shawn: But I just want to know that day to whet our audience's appetite.

Denver: Oh, it was the day—after the year I thought it was—in which the Sunday School president, the bishop, came to my house and called me to be the Gospel Doctrine teacher for the first time. And I taught gospel doctrine for 25 years after that. Yeah.

Shawn: So that gives us some idea.

When we come back with Denver, we're going to have more exchange on some *words* that I want to throw at him, and just let him say what he thinks about these words. And then we're going to hear him tell about what he's— What's really happening now with what he's

doing *today* within the faith—and I'll call it the faith of all faiths—within the faith. What is he doing? And what does it mean to people who are seeking?

Really appreciate you taking the time. Appreciate your audience's respect. We've had some audiences not respectful. These guys are good, so that best reflects well on you in some ways.

Denver: That's good. That's good.

Shawn: Yeah, it is good. And so let's keep going, and we'll come back and see you next week here on *Heart of the Matter*.

The foregoing interview is rebroadcast here with permission from Shawn McCraney, host of the *Heart of the Matter* YouTube channel.