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Welcome to the Project Zion Podcast. This podcast explores the unique spiritual and theological gifts Community of Christ offers for today's world.

Lach Mackay 00:33

Welcome to Project Zion Podcast. This is Cuppa Joe, where we explore restoration history. And I'm your host for that today, Karen Peter, and our guest is Lach Mackay. Now Lach's been on Project Zion millions of times, I'm sure is the actual literal number. But you are often on Project Zion. Lach is a member of the Council of 12 Apostles. He serves as Historic Site Director and as Church History and Sacred Story Ministries Team lead what we used to call church historian and our calling Church History and Sacred Story Ministries. Lach is and historian and an author, and he often presents at the Salt Lake City Sunstone Symposium and I think at the Nauvoo Sunstones as well, you can be found since your since you live pretty close to there, I'd say. So many of our listeners have met you in one of those capacities, Lach. So welcome back to Project Zion Podcast.

Lach Mackay 01:31

Thank you, always a privilege to be with you.

Lach Mackay 01:34

So today, we're going to talk about your contribution to the Historic Sites Foundation Summer Lecture Series that took place this past summer. And your contribution is the Life Legacy and Lessons from Joseph Smith III. Now many of our listeners are more familiar with a different Joseph Smith, the Joseph Smith Jr. But today we're going to talk about his eldest son, Joseph III. So introduce us, if you will, or for our longtime Community of Christ, folks re introduce us to this important figure in Community of Christ.

Lach Mackay 02:11

Joseph Smith III, of course, the oldest surviving son of Joseph and Emma Smith, as you suggested, is a critically important person in the development of Community of Christ. He was our Prophet President, for 54 years,

Karin Peter 02:26

Wow!

Karin Peter 02:27

joined us was just this incredibly diverse group of the centers, often referred to as the scattered saints, Illinois, Wisconsin, Iowa, just just kind of folks who, for whatever reason, had not gone West. And under his direction, those people were slowly tracked down and relationships developed. And those relationships often grew into membership in the Reorganization. And it's just amazing to me that he was able to kind of stitch us back together into a cohesive, cohesive group. Under his leadership, we grew from maybe 300 members to 72,000, by his death in 1914, also played a really important role in

returning us to kind of Kirtland period theology. Alma Blair has talked about us, we don't call ourselves Mormon, then not a bad two word description, moderate Mormon, and really returning to an 1830s Kirtland theology. And that was critically important, Joseph III to do as well.

Karin Peter 03:40

Okay, let's stop there for a minute. And when we talk about that, of course, most Community of Christ folks just had a shiver down their spine when you put us under the Mormon umbrella, but let's look at it from that broader perspective. And what that kind of meant in 1860, in this time period, so when you say took us back to a Kirtland kind of moderate Mormon perspective or theology, what are you talking about?

Lach Mackay 04:07

We're talking about is, is a, an understanding that's really grounded in the pages of the New Testament, particularly the New Testament book of Acts, chapter two. So a gathered community of believers, passionate about proclaiming the gospel to the rest of the world, sharing or trying anyway, all things common, so that the surplus of the wealthy could lift up the poor, so just desperately focused on the needs of the poor, maybe because we were the poor. And because Acts is so early in Christian history, that temples still plays a role in the life of the church, they're still Jewish. So, Kirtland temple, a building focused on a spiritual empowerment, intellectual empowerment, as well as a place to worship. So two thirds of Kirtland temple were classroom space. The lower court the first floor, Sunday worship Thursday, prayer meetings, things like that. So it's a kind of Latter Day Saint-ism. That is, is not uncomfortable to Orthodox Christians, in most ways. exceptions, of course, being prophetic leadership, open canon scripture Book of Mormon, that would, of course, still be uncomfortable. So yeah, I recognize that Mormonism uncomfortable for some, but in historical circles, it's not so uncomfortable.

Karin Peter 05:38

Right. So we're talking about a practice in theology of people that really revolved around spiritual, what we would now call spiritual formation, or spiritual empowerment. The educational aspects of what it meant to be a disciple. And then of course, the gathered worship experience, which sounds like a really typical kind of Christian expression there, without the oddities that you threw in there. Yeah. Okay. So that helps kind of look at where, where that is, and what that what that is. So this is, this is kind of the legacy that we have from Joseph Smith III, but let's go back and talk a little bit about him. He grew up in Nauvoo. And he grew up after the death of his father. So what do we know about Joseph Smith, the third and his experience growing up and

Lach Mackay 06:35

So in some ways, he was growing up in a, an almost abandoned city, that's overstating it. But you know, there were probably 12,000 folks here in 1845, or so 46. But soon, many, many headed west and others scattered in different directions. So we probably dropped to maybe 1200, folks. And so Joseph is growing up kind of in the shadow of his father's grand communitarian experiment. If it had to be, though, in some ways, a wonderful place to grow up with the Mississippi River on three sides of us. There's all kinds of opportunities for both recreation and sport and a place that had been kind of pulled apart by religion became a place where the social life for young people for teenagers and young adults really centered around church. So Joseph III talks about how he regularly went to church with his

friends, whether it was Catholic mass, or the Methodists or the Presbyterians, religion was not something that, that people thought about after just as a junior staff in Nauvoo. And almost every congregation had both an English speaking congregation and a German speaking congregation. So Nauvoo soon is, is full of Germanic people. And so just to the third would have been interacting with with those folks as well. Soon French Ikarians come in another utopian group who lived communally, so he would have been kind of watching others attempt to live out some of these same concepts, as well. Eventually, courtesy the influence of his stepfather, Louis Bidamon, went to Canton, Illinois, and studied law, and that we can touch on that later. But that really was critically important in his development in his worldview.

Karin Peter 08:38

So in your lecture, you talk about a variety of topics that kind of shaped his character, his life and character, some of them from before his father's death. And one of those is the militaristic legacy of Nauvoo. That, that was very prevalent when, when Joseph Smith Jr. was alive. And also this idea of the German immigration, French immigration and others coming into the Nauvoo area, including those immigrants who had come as part of the restoration movement. And also you talk about slavery a little bit and Joseph Smith III's perspective, formative perspective on that. So can you talk about any of those or any other kind of character, shaping topics from his life and Nauvoo?

Lach Mackay 09:27

Yeah, so we remember that Joseph III, lived through some really violent episodes in the life of the church, whether it's being expelled from far west Missouri and the extermination order. At one point he separated by the point of a sword from his father in Missouri. You know, his dad is locked up there for months. He witnesses the rise of the Nauvoo Legion, probably the second largest group after the US standing army thing, us standing army, maybe 1000 folk, maybe 3000 in the Nauvoo Legion in the zeal. So the fact that we're engaged in the Legion is not unusual you, you're legally obligated to have a state militia, participate in it, if you're a white adult male between certain ages, but we were really passionate about it, and our zeal for that, that military organization frightened our neighbors. Joseph III even as a child is engaged with the Legion initially something called Bailey's boys troops. But he says "probably due to the influence of my mother, I assumed, I stop participating" and see watched what happened and then watch them with the murder of his uncle and father and the dispersal of the community. He came to believe that the spirit of militarism in Nauvoo, and which originated in Missouri was a very significant mistake. He was especially troubled that returned to the Scriptures to justify our embracing of violence to try and settle conflicts. And he's not quick ever to judge his father. But but he says, I think it was a mistake for the leading minds of the church, the leading figures in the church, to kind of get caught up in that spirit of militarism. And he is critical and in kind of returning what would become Community of Christ, to the path of peacemakers. In other ways, he expressed that, that seeking peace through justice, particularly for example, when it comes to immigrants, by 1858, he's serving as just as the peace in Nauvoo, it's kind of a combination of Sheriff and judge. And by 1860, almost everybody in Nauvoo is some kind of immigrant. And Joseph III came to believe that those people were being taken advantage of because of their lack of familiarity with our language and customs. So he would try and protect them by doing their legal work for a reduced fee, or for no cost, if they couldn't pay. He felt pretty strongly about the need to defend and protect folks who were at a disadvantage here. That concern was also expressed when it came to enslave peoples. Joseph Smith III hated slavery with a

passion. It played a very significant role in the development of his political worldview. But as Justice of the Peace, there were times when people would turn to him and ask for help to arrest runaway slaves, he would refuse to do it. At one point, somebody threatened him with the law if he wouldn't help and he said, "No court in the land can make laws fast enough or strong enough to make it slave catcher out of me." So just really passionate about folks on the margins, what some might think of as the fringe dwellers in society, Joseph III simply refused to allow them to be left on the fringes, and would do everything we can to pull them into the center.

Karin Peter 13:30

We think about this period of time or talking about the time leading up to during and following the Civil War in the United States. And so all of these topics, the movement of immigrants, and the reality of enslaved people in the United States, and in our political system, and military service, and the taking of human life, all of those aspects that were very current very topical, at that period of time. So you said earlier that.

Lach Mackay 14:05

So for Joseph III,

Karin Peter 14:07

No, go ahead.

Lach Mackay 14:09

I was just gonna say on military service. But Joseph III came to believe that we shouldn't enlist, but if drafted, we should serve. Kind of an interesting thing.

Karin Peter 14:23

That sounds that sounds like a lawyer response. So you did say that his stepfather encouraged him to study law? Do we know why or what drove that?

Lach Mackay 14:40

I'm guessing that Louis probably saw it as a potentially lucrative career with Louis Bidamon opportunities to make money and we're always near the top of the list of things he was interested in. But I'm guessing he also recognized in Joseph III and I think Joseph III probably inherited this from Emma, kind of a legalistic mindset. So even before any legal training, I think that's simply the way Joseph the third saw the world. And I think Lewis probably recognized that in him.

Karin Peter 15:16

So in his life growing up in Nauvoo as a young person, and then the aspects of his engagement with people in the Nauvoo area, and as he studied law, and then as he stepped into leadership of what became the reorganization, Joseph Smith, the third also married. And in fact, in the course of his life, he married three times, although only to one wife at a time, so we make that clear for all of our listeners. So can you tell us a little bit about Joseph Smith's partners in his lifetime, the women he married?

Lach Mackay 16:01

Yes. Joseph, the third first wife was Emmeline Griswold she grew up in the Nauvoo area, her family were not Latter Day Saints, in fact, were quite antagonistic towards the latter day saints, just in the third matter, and wasn't a particularly significant event. But a few months later, after coming back from Canton, and his studying law, saw her walking down the street, and just as the third turn to his brother and said, if you'll jump out, I'm going to offer Miss Chris ball a ride home. And if, if I can, I'm going to make her my wife. And so the brother jumped out and just, I was typically known as Emma. And they began pouring in, eventually are married, her family was again, not at all supportive, and it seems even disowned her for a short period over marrying the son of the Mormon prophet. So at their wedding, it was just Joseph a third and Emmeline and the Presbyterian minister who married them. And I think one young woman, that German girl who was the maid of honor, so eventually the family got over it and, and they seem to get along well, and eventually, Emmeline, about three years before her death, joined the reorganization, she was baptized by David and Joseph the third, as he proposed kind of laid out and it was just one condition, if I ever feel the need to join a Latter Day Saint religious tradition or even lead, I need your permission upfront to do that and be supportive. So that was the one condition going into the to the marriage.

Karin Peter 17:54

And she agreed, apparently.

Lach Mackay 17:55

Yeah. They really agreed. Yeah. They had I think it was five children, not all survived. And I think often the case with your first love Joseph a third, was just smitten with Emmeline. She was not particularly healthy though she was pretty fragile when it came to health. And following a miscarriage. She was ill for a number of months and then died. As you can imagine, dating for Joseph a third at that time living in Plano, Illinois. The force get family moved into the home to try and help. But there was also a young woman, Bertha Madison, who was living in the home by that time to help care for the kids and do some housekeeping, as in like Mazel Bertha story. She was part of a Norwegian community, not too far from Plano, Illinois, and they a number of them had become Latter Day Saints in the 1840s. Following Joseph Smith Jr's death, some had become associated with James straying, but others simply are kind of out there on the prairies, farming, and birth his family was in that area. And she had as a young girl join the reorganization and was part of what was called the mission Illinois branch. Almost all Norwegians. So good, good Norwegian stock. There was a fair amount of gossip going around because there was a single woman living in the Prophet's home. Even though the force good family was there as well going it was chaperones, just as a third just tried to ignore the gossip. But eventually it got so so bad that Bertha was found by just sitting there crying one day, so upset by it, and he realized he had to do something in prayer. And apparently, there were two attractive options for Joseph a third. But after a period of prayer, he ended up proposing to Bertha. They were married and were happily married for 26 or so years. A number of children from that marriage including Frederick Madison, Smith and Israel, a Smith, both of whom were later become presidents of the reorganization. By the time they're living in Lamoni, lowa in the 1880s, they move there, but Bertha is killed in a carriage accident, her horse spooked and bolted in, she was thrown was just again devastating for Joseph the third, I think it's 19 8096. Just the third had no, no intention of marrying again, about a year later, he is in Canada, and his meets a young woman who had actually met at a Kirtland reunion earlier, but they became

reacquainted and soon, the closest companions. This one for some people was was even more scandalous, because more than 30 years separated them in age. But soon Joseph a third marries a to Clark, and brings her home to lamoni, lowa, introduces him to his family there. And they have three children, including W. Wallace Smith, who also would become a president of the organization. So just the third is would have twice married three times having children in his 70s, the three of his sons succeeded him in the presidency in the church, the third of whom became a profit President 98 years after his father had assumed that role. Wow.

Karin Peter 21:57

I guess when you're having children in your 70s, you can have those long time spans. So I can, I wanted to just kind of go back a minute when you talked about the gossip that was shaping around the household, because Bertha was an unmarried woman living in the household. With the history from Joseph Smith Jr, you can understand the concerns that would tend to shape and form some of that gossip that was happening in the church community, and, and try to think that maybe people weren't just being vicious, they were actually concerned about what that looked like.

Lach Mackay 22:43

Yeah, I think they're just being vicious. I agree that there would be some reasons for concern. So when he did, merrier, then people complained that he hadn't waited long enough after the death of Emmeline because he married a woman of foreign Ah, yeah, yeah.

Karin Peter 23:02

Yeah. Okay. So typical. Yeah, typical small group behavior. Never mind, I want to, I want to try to make it sound better than it actually, obviously was. So when he married Emmeline, he had this provision that if he decided to participate in a Latter Day Saint tradition, that he would need her support. Some would say that he was reluctant to do that very thing, and in fact, was reluctant to take up the leadership of what became the reorganization. So can you tell us a little bit of how, how that transpired? And how did he come to be the first profit president of the reorganization?

Lach Mackay 23:49

Yeah, it would be one of those people who, who would say he was reluctant to take up that role. So he was living his life, happily in Nauvoo. And some financial struggles at times lost some children. So there was clearly pain in his life as well. And it was not uncommon for members of the various Latter-day Seekers traditions to visit and it was not uncommon for them to invite or hope that Joseph the third or other Smith family members might join them would bring significant credibility to their movements, I think was their belief. And at some point, just the third was having a conversation with Christopher and Putnam Yates. They were novel residents and they were actually encouraging him to go to Utah. saying things like, you could be rich and you could marry lots of cute wives and what are you doing here? And just the third guy to wonder if maybe it was just his mother's biases that had convinced him that that was such a terrible idea. He had a visit from George A Smith and arrest of snow apostles in the holiest room At the time inviting him to come on out. He just kind of want to do but but had a visionary experience which led him to believe that that was not an option. He should not go west, but he still wasn't sure what he shouldn't do. And then he is visited by Samuel girly and EC Briggs. They were missionaries for what was becoming the the reorganization or the new organization. And they expected

that as they extended an invitation to Joseph a third, he would immediately accept and immediately step in and lead them. Instead, he stopped just short of kicking them out of his house. He just didn't want anything to do with them. One of them was angry, and one of them started crying. Oh, my. But Samuel girlie decided to stay in the area. And I think it's been about a year. And I ended up working for Joseph Smith a third and, and forming a really nice relationship. I think that was was critically important and and what would follow. Eventually, Joseph the third reached out to William marks, who had been the State President in 1840s novel a very good friend of the Smith family. And they were doing some corresponding and just the third eventually felt laddie hits against a pretty rough experiences in his life. But felt led to join with what was becoming the reorganization. It's kind of funny when he wrote William marks and said, I think I'm ready. Marx responded by saying we've had enough of man made profits, and we don't want any more of that sort of God has called you, we want to know it, if he has the churches ready to sustain you. If not, we want nothing to do with you. I don't think that's the response to the third was expecting.

Karin Peter 26:51

Well, they're okay.

Lach Mackay 26:54

But eventually, in April of 1816, Joseph and his mom Emma, traveled to envoy, Illinois and united with the reorganization, they were accepted on their original baptisms. And Joseph, the third comes prophet president, at that same gathering. He said some really interesting things that he did that things like, have come by a power not my own, you know, if the same spirit that has sent me prompts my acceptance, I'm with you. He also said, I believe in the Bible, and the Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants, which are auxiliaries to the Bible. That's kind of interesting. But join with us April 6 of 1860, Amboy, Illinois.

Karin Peter 27:44

That is interesting language auxiliaries. It's very reflective that we have similar language. We don't use auxiliaries. But in our statement on scripture. We talked about the Bible as central to our faith in the restoration scripture supports but does not replace that text. Yeah, yeah. Part of his legacy. So you mentioned his sons who went on to lead the reorganization. You mentioned the three of his sons who did that. Anything else you want to share about them? We have a Project Zion Podcast that Andrew Bolton did that talks a little bit about Frederick Madison Smith, but I don't think we've, we've talked about Israel.

Lach Mackay 28:33

Yeah. So for them was all about industrial science. So I think very much like all all of us people of our times, but committed to this concept of building the kingdom of God on earth, and was very interested in communitarian experiments, buying property in Jackson County, Missouri and Atherton and trying to develop communal farming and things like that. He was our leader from 1915 to 1946. He had a PhD from Clark University, very well educated. Some remember him is kind of gruff. Or the family tradition is that he wouldn't even kill an ant. Or he had a mouse pet mouse that lived in his cabin with him and would feed it rather than taking it out. So it's kind of fun to see the different ways that people remember. Remember us as we pass, he also couldn't see very well. So people would complain that he walked

past him and not say hello. He didn't recognize his brother so Fred and dies in 1846, his brother than Israel, a Smith succeeds him. The biography on Israel is called gentle monarch, I think that really encapsulates Israel's personality, well, much loved leader. And he really helped us expand our understandings of Zion. And these ideas of building the kingdom of God where you're at, not necessarily having the most talented, pack up and move to Jackson County, Missouri. So Israel helped to start turning even more outward. He's killed in a car accident. And he is 62 by his half brother, W. Wallace Smith.

Karin Peter 30:35

W Wallace is the first president of the church that I remember hearing about and meeting as a young child. One of the things the presidents of the church used to do in may still do once we can travel, again, is show up when a congregation has a dedication, having paid off their building, or has 100 year anniversary, or those types of things. And I remember w Wallace came out in the early 1960s, to where I lived, and we all dressed in our finest and came down to meet the president of the church. So Joseph Smith, the third legacy went beyond the three men that then led the church into what we would call the modern age. There was more there were more aspects of his legacy, what are some of the important kind of strains of his legacy that we can still see in the church?

Lach Mackay 31:36

I think among the most important are his interest in reconnecting with our, our focus on peace, which was actually there in the very earliest years of the church 1830 3132. But soon, that'll last in this frontier culture of violence. Joseph, the third, managed to redirect us back towards becoming peacemakers. And he focuses on that theme again, and again, and again. It's so integrated into the life of the church that I think a lot of people miss it. It's, it's woven in so so finally. So I think maybe the greatest gift just in the third gave us or one of them anyway, was returning us to that focus on the pursuit of peace. critically important, I think also is, I don't know if it's so much a rejection of Nauvoo, theologically, as his lack of accepting, you know, he's a child when his dad is killed. But so what Joseph did is, is go back and start looking at the teachings of the church, in the Scriptures, and in the church newspapers, and affect the public teachings of the church. And that is what he worked to, to rebuild. So the private part of Nauvoo, for plural, marriage, plurality, God's progression. godhood simply didn't make it into the reorganization, I say that, but there were some members who had been in Nauvoo and believe some of those things, just the third would approach that by saying, well, that's fine, you're welcome to believe that. But I'm not going to give you the pages of the Herald to teach it, and I'm not not going to invite you to preach that from the pulpit. And, and he was young, and they died. So he one in the end, folks.

Karin Peter 33:44

So he began our faithful disagrees policy?

Lach Mackay 33:48

and return us to the new. He did and that's another I think, really critical element is Elkins dissent set and protected dissenters. There were obviously limits. But yeah, I think it's critically important what he did. And I think that's kind of fleshed out in our, our faithful disagreement principles today.

Karin Peter 34:12

I'm wondering how the his experience with other denominations growing up informed him I seem to recall him, either quoting Charles Wesley, or making a comment where he referred to Charles Wesley in saying that he found either good or truth in lots of expressions of a Christian community.

Lach Mackay 34:38

I haven't seen that quote, but that sure sounds like something that just as a third would quote, and I have to think, as you suggested that his interaction with with those of other phase and his attendance of other churches, was critical in that development. He attends the Parliament of world religions in Chicago in the 1890s And comes away really impressed with somebody. He describes it as an Indian philosopher, who points out that, that, that we don't listen to what Jesus teaches as Christians, that not only do we turn to violence, but at times, we strike first. This guy was calling out Christians for not practicing what their book teaches, though, even into going to interfaith ideas at the time in the 1890s.

Karin Peter 35:33

So some of these aspects of his life and leadership continue to shape Community of Christ. What are some things that you see now as we move forward, particularly as we're called to move towards Jesus, the peaceful one, what from Joseph Smith, a third is still shaping us.

Lach Mackay 35:53

So we touched on it a little bit, but that that focus on the pursuit of peace is still very much with this. The the comfortableness, with dissent, welcoming dissent, defending dissenters protecting dissenters. Now, with our restoration of schism in the 1980s, that got harder. And some of our members have struggled with how to interact with dissenters in more recent years. But, but that's why I think these principles of faithful disagreement are so very important. And I think the third is pragmatism, this, this biography, by Roger Launius, to submit the third pragmatic prophet is the title, which I highly recommend. I think that, that his pragmatism is very much alive and well, in the church today.

Karin Peter 36:51

So when you look back and in kind of process, your study of the life and legacy of Joseph Smith, the third, not just as historical figure, but as a contributing forefather of your own family, what has what about him has shaped your discipleship, that you can kind of look today and say, yeah, that, that pretty much came from there? Or what about him? Do you aspire to have shaped your discipleship?

Lach Mackay 37:26

So, like, just the third, I'm extraordinarily pragmatic. And, and I like to think that, that that was shaped by Justice Smith a third, I kind of think, though, I was just born that way. And so I just connect to that element more quickly. But But I really appreciate the way he approached conflict in the church. And, and he made sure there was room for folks. You know, when when something goes wrong, I don't panic, I don't start screaming and yelling. I just learned from it and do what I can to make sure it doesn't happen again. I like to think that that's how Joseph Smith a third would have approached some of these situations as well.

Karin Peter 38:18

I want to thank you, Locke, for being willing to share with us a little bit about Joseph Smith a third. And I would encourage folks to go to the historic sites foundation webpage, and, and view your entire lecture, you have photographs and other visuals that were just wonderful to see and to look at and help understand. Joseph Smith a third more fully, any last thoughts about his life and legacy you want to share with our listeners.

Lach Mackay 38:47

So want to recommend, again, pragmatic profit, Roger Launius, University of Illinois, try and find a used copy, you can still buy new but it's print on demand and really expensive. And just admit the thirds and memoirs are a fun read, it's not the kind of thing you'll sit down and read cover to cover, I'm guessing, but lots of really interesting stories and lots of detail that you don't find anywhere else. If you're coming from the background of the Church of Jesus Christ, and lots of stories about people that, you know, but stories that you've never heard before. So it's kind of fun to get just a slightly different take on some of the things that were happening in Nauvoo, and later.

Karin Peter 39:30

And also you contributed to a text with some other authors on the peace strain in Community of Christ. Can you and that's it Herald house.org Can you give us the title of that text as well,

Karin Peter 39:42

in pursuit of peace.

Karin Peter 39:45

So listeners, you can find that at Herald house.org or you can go to the Community of Christ website and click on affiliates and it will take you directly there for resources. Again, I want to point early our listeners to the Historic Sites Foundation website where you can see not only Locke's lecture on Joseph Smith the third but the other lectures from the Historic Site Foundation's Summer Series. And so some of them connect. I think when we talk to Barb Walden about Marietta Walker, we find FM Smith, Joseph Smith, the third son appearing in that lecture as well. So there's lots of crossover. And in the meantime, check back this is Cup of Joe, part of the Project Zion Podcast. We've been chatting with Lach Mackay. Thanks so much for listening.

Josh Mangelson 40:43

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