



## The Nearness of the Kingdom

Meister Eckhart

St. Luke xxi, 31. — “ Know that the Kingdom of God is near.”

OUR Lord saith that the Kingdom of God is near us. Yea, the Kingdom of God is within us as St Paul saith “our salvation is nearer than when we believed.” Now we should know in what manner the Kingdom of God is near us. Therefore let us pay diligent attention to the meaning of the words. If I were a king, and did not know it, I should not really be a king. But, if I were fully convinced that I was a king, and all mankind coincided in my belief, and I knew that they shared my conviction, I should indeed be a king, and all the wealth of the king would be mine. But, if one of these three conditions were lacking, I should not really be a king.

In similar fashion our salvation depends upon our knowing and recognizing the Chief Good which is God Himself. I have a capacity in my soul for taking in God entirely. I am as sure as I live that nothing is so near to me as God. God is nearer to me than I am to myself; my existence depends on the nearness and presence of God. He is also near things of wood and stone, but they know it not. If a piece of wood became as aware of the nearness of God as an archangel is, the piece of wood would be as happy as an archangel. For this reason man is happier than the inanimate wood, because he knows and understands how God is near him. His happiness increases and diminishes in proportion to the increase and diminution in his knowledge of this. His happiness does not arise from this that God is near him, and in him, and that He possesses God; but from this, that he knows the nearness of God, and loves Him, and is aware that “the Kingdom of God is near.” So, when I think on God’s Kingdom, I am compelled to be silent because of its immensity, because God’s Kingdom is none other than God Himself with all His riches. God’s Kingdom is no small thing: we may survey in imagination all the worlds of God’s creation, but they are not God’s Kingdom. In whichever soul God’s Kingdom appeareth, and which knoweth God’s Kingdom, that soul needeth no human preaching or instruction; it is taught from within and assured of eternal life. Whoever knows and recognizes how near God’s Kingdom is to him may say with Jacob, “God is in this place, and I knew it not.”

God is equally near in all creatures. The wise man saith, “God hath spread out His net over all creatures, so that whosoever wishes to discover Him may find and recognize Him in each one.” Another saith, “He knows God rightly who recognizes Him alike in all things.” To serve God with fear is good; to serve Him out of love is better; but to fear and love Him together is best of all. To have a restful or peaceful life in God is good; to bear a life of pain in patience is better; but to have peace in the midst of pain is the best of all.

A man may go into the field and say his prayer and be aware of God, or, he may be in Church and be aware of God; but, if he is more aware of Him because he is in a quiet place,

that is his own deficiency and not due to God, Who is alike present in all things and places, and is willing to give Himself everywhere so far as lies in Him. He knows God rightly who knows Him everywhere. St Bernard saith, "How is it that mine eye and not my foot sees heaven? Because mine eye is more like heaven than my foot is. So, if my soul is to know God, it must be God-like."

Now, how is the soul to arrive at this heavenly state that it recognizes God in itself, and knows that He is near? By copying the heavens, which can receive no impulse from without to mar their tranquility. Thus must the soul, which would know God, be rooted and grounded in Him so steadfastly, as to suffer no perturbation of fear or hope, or joy or sorrow, or love or hate, or anything which may disturb its peace.

The heavens are everywhere alike remote from earth, so should the soul be remote from all earthly things alike so as not to be nearer to one than another. It should keep the same attitude of aloofness in love and hate, in possession and renouncement, that is, it should be simultaneously dead, resigned and lifted up. The heavens are pure and clear without shadow of stain, out of space and out of time. Nothing corporeal is found there. Their revolutions are incredibly swift and independent of time, though time depends on them. Nothing hinders the soul so much in attaining to the knowledge of God as time and place. Therefore, if the soul is to know God, it must know Him outside time and place, since God is neither in this or that, but One and above them. If the soul is to see God, it must look at nothing in time; for while the soul is occupied with time or place or any image of the kind, it cannot recognize God. If it is to know Him, it must have no fellowship with nothingness. Only he knows God who recognizes that all creatures are nothingness. For, if one creature be set over against another, it may appear to be beautiful and somewhat, but if it be set over against God, it is nothing. I say moreover: If the soul is to know God it must forget itself and lose itself, for as long as it contemplates self, it cannot contemplate God. When it has lost itself and everything in God, it finds itself again in God when it attains to the knowledge of Him, and it finds also everything which it had abandoned complete in God. If I am to know the highest good, and the everlasting Godhead, truly, I must know them as they are in themselves apart from creation. If I am to know real existence, I must know it as it is in itself, not as it is parceled out in creatures.

The whole Being of God is contained in God alone. The whole of humanity is not contained in one man, for one man is not all men. But in God the soul knows all humanity, and all things at their highest level of existence, since it knows them in their essence. Suppose any one to be in a beautifully adorned house: he would know much more about it than one who had never entered therein, and yet wished to speak much about it. Thus, I am as sure, as I am of my own existence and God's, that, if the soul is to know God, it must know Him outside of time and place. Such a soul will know clearly how near God's kingdom is.

Schoolmen have often asked how it is possible for the soul to know God. It is not from severity that God demands much from men in order to obtain the knowledge of Himself: it is of His kindness that He wills the soul by effort to grow capacious of receiving much, and that He may give much. Let no man think that to attain this knowledge is too difficult, although it may sound so, and indeed the commencement of it, and the renouncement of all things, is difficult. But when one attains to it, no life is easier nor more pleasant nor more lovable, since God is always endeavouring to dwell with man, and teach him in order to bring him to Himself. No man desires anything so eagerly as God desires to bring men

to the knowledge of Himself. God is always ready, but we are very unready. God is near us, but we are far from Him. God is within, and we are without. God is friendly; we are estranged. The prophet saith, "God leadeth the righteous by a narrow path into a broad and wide place, that is into the true freedom of those who have become one spirit with God." May God help us all to follow Him that He may bring us to Himself. Amen.

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*Meister Eckhart's Sermons.* Trans. Claud Field. London: H. R. Allenson, 1909.

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