

Homiletics Analysis: Mark 1

Content & Intent

This Text — Content

Mark 1 opens with no genealogy, no birth narrative, no extended prologue — only a single declarative sentence functioning as a title for the entire Gospel: “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (v. 1). Everything that follows in this chapter is the explosive enactment of that title. John the Baptist arrives as the prophesied forerunner (vv. 2–8), fulfilling Isaiah and Malachi, preparing the way for One whose sandals John is unworthy to carry. Jesus is baptized (vv. 9–11), and the heavens are torn open — the Father speaks, the Spirit descends, the Son is confirmed. The temptation in the wilderness (vv. 12–13) is narrated in two stark verses: driven by the Spirit, tested forty days by Satan, attended by angels. John’s arrest becomes the trigger for Jesus’ public ministry (v. 14), and He arrives in Galilee proclaiming the kingdom of God and calling men to repent and believe. The call of the first disciples (vv. 16–20) is instantaneous — Jesus speaks, they leave everything, they follow. The synagogue at Capernaum witnesses His teaching with authority and His immediate, unchallenged exorcism (vv. 21–28). The healing of Peter’s mother-in-law follows (vv. 29–31), and then the whole city converges at evening (vv. 32–34). Jesus rises before dawn to pray (vv. 35–38), then departs to preach throughout Galilee (v. 39). The chapter closes with the healing of a leper — a man untouchable by law — whom Jesus touches and cleanses (vv. 40–45).

The structural logic of Mark 1 is cumulative and accelerating. Mark’s signature word εὐθύς (*euthys*, “immediately”) appears approximately eleven times in this chapter alone. Nothing lingers. The effect is not haste for its own sake but the overwhelming force of divine arrival — a King who speaks and it is done, commands and it stands fast, calls and people follow, touches and disease flees. The chapter is not a collection of incidents but a unified demonstration of a single reality: the arrival of the Son of God in power.

This Text — Intent

God’s intent through Mark 1 is to confront the reader with the identity of Jesus Christ in such overwhelming terms that passive observation becomes impossible. This is not a chapter designed to inform about Jesus — it is designed to arrest the reader before Him. The cumulative force of authority after authority, demonstration after demonstration, is not descriptive but interrogative: *Who then is this man?* Mark raises that question not abstractly but by pressing the reader into the same position as those in the synagogue who said, “What is this? A new teaching — with authority!” (v. 27) and as the disciples who left everything immediately. The chapter demands a response. It is the beginning of the gospel

— not merely the start of a book, but the initiation of a claim that will not release the reader until they have answered the question of who Jesus is and what they will do with Him.

Subject Sentence: The Son of God arrives in power, identity confirmed, authority demonstrated, calling for total response.

Primary Claim: God is confronting every reader with the overwhelming, undeniable authority of Jesus Christ — the Son of God who commands creation, demons, disease, and disciples — so that no one can remain a neutral observer; the only options are to flee or to follow.

Interpretive Evaluation

The title in v. 1 — “Son of God”

A text-critical question surrounds the phrase “Son of God” in v. 1, with some manuscripts omitting it. However, the weight of manuscript evidence supports its inclusion, and the theological coherence of the chapter argues decisively for it — the Father’s declaration at baptism (v. 11: “You are my beloved Son”), the demons’ recognition of identity (v. 24: “the Holy One of God”), and the centurion’s confession at the cross (15:39: “Truly this man was the Son of God”) together form a deliberate Markan *inclusio*. The phrase in v. 1 is not a scribal addition but the thesis of the Gospel. Reformed reading: the title is original and programmatic.

The baptism of Jesus (vv. 9–11) — Adoptionist vs. Confirmatory readings

Arminian and liberal-critical readings sometimes press the baptism toward an adoptionist Christology — the moment at which Jesus “becomes” the Son of God, either by divine appointment or spiritual empowerment. This reading cannot survive the chapter’s own testimony: the title in v. 1 precedes the baptism, and the Father’s words (“You *are* my beloved Son”) are confirmatory and relational, not constitutive or inaugural. The Spirit’s descent is the anointing for ministry, not the origin of sonship. The Reformed reading — affirmed also by Lutheran and Baptist orthodoxy — is that the baptism is the public confirmation of the Son’s identity and the Spirit’s equipping for the messianic mission, not the creation of that identity.

The temptation narrative (vv. 12–13) — Minimalist vs. typological readings

Dispensational readings sometimes treat Mark’s compressed temptation account as merely transitional filler before the “real” ministry begins. Wesleyan readings occasionally emphasize the temptation as a moral example of resisting sin. Neither reading engages what Mark is doing. Mark’s brevity is itself exegetically significant: Mark is not narrating a

moral test but announcing a cosmic confrontation. The “forty days” echoes Israel’s forty years — Jesus is the true Israel succeeding where the nation failed. The wild animals may recall Adam’s dominion or the Psalm 91 promise. “Angels were ministering to him” signals divine vindication. The Reformed and redemptive-historical reading — that Jesus is here functioning as the last Adam and true Israel — best accounts for the allusions without forcing more than the text provides.

The call of the disciples (vv. 16–20) — exemplary vs. effectual readings

Roman Catholic and some Wesleyan-Arminian readings treat the disciples’ immediate response primarily as a model of radical discipleship — “leave everything for Jesus.” This is not wrong as far as it goes, and the application value is real. However, it risks reducing the scene to an imperative (be like them) rather than reading it first as a demonstration (this is who Jesus is). The disciples do not respond because they are exceptionally committed — they respond because Jesus speaks with the authority of the One who calls. The scene demonstrates *His* power to effectuate following, not their superior willingness. The Reformed reading does not dismiss the call to radical discipleship but grounds it in the character and authority of the One calling — this guards against moralism and keeps the Christological center in place.

Exorcism and spiritual authority (vv. 21–28) — Pentecostal/Charismatic readings

Pentecostal and charismatic traditions sometimes read the exorcism primarily as a model for contemporary spiritual warfare and deliverance ministry. This reading, while capturing something genuine about spiritual reality, displaces the passage’s primary function. The exorcism in Mark 1 is not principally instructional but demonstrative — it is a public credential of Jesus’ authority. The demon’s cry (“I know who you are — the Holy One of God”) is the involuntary confession of the enemy, and Jesus’ command silences it. The primary claim is Christological: the arrival of the King means the domain of the enemy is being invaded and dismantled. Application to spiritual warfare is legitimate but secondary; the passage’s first demand is awe before the One who has this authority, not technique for replicating His acts.

Key Canonical Support

- **Isaiah 40:3 / Malachi 3:1** — Both OT prophets are cited explicitly in vv. 2–3; John’s arrival as forerunner confirms that Jesus is the LORD whose way is being prepared — not merely a prophet but the covenant God arriving in person.
- **Genesis 22:2 / Psalm 2:7** — The Father’s words at the baptism (“my beloved Son”) echo the Aqedah language and the royal Psalm of messianic enthronement; the baptism is both the confirmation of unique filial identity and royal commissioning.

- **Isaiah 53 / Mark 10:45** — The Servant who comes not to be served but to serve and give His life as a ransom; the authority displayed throughout Mark 1 is the authority of the One who will exercise it through suffering, not despite it.
- **Romans 1:1–4** — Paul’s summary declaration of the gospel of God concerning the Son — “declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness” — is the theological frame that Mark 1 narrates; they are reading the same reality.
- **Colossians 1:13–14** — “He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son” — the cosmic transfer Mark 1 begins to enact (the invasion of the enemy’s domain, the arrival of the kingdom) is the doctrinal statement Paul later articulates.

Aim: To press the reader into the same position as the witnesses in Mark 1 — confronted by overwhelming evidence of who Jesus is — so that the only response the text leaves open is surrender and following.

Content Table

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
1	Title: “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God”	Programmatic thesis of the entire Gospel; “Son of God” is the controlling identity claim
2–3	OT citation (Isaiah/Malachi): a forerunner will prepare the way of the LORD	Both citations conflated under “Isaiah” — the way of the LORD = Yahweh arriving in person
4–6	John the Baptist appears: baptism of repentance, proclaiming a coming One	Wilderness location recalls Elijah; clothing and diet echo Elijah (2 Kings 1:8)
7–8	John’s testimony: the Coming One is infinitely greater; He baptizes with the Holy Spirit	“Sandals” language = profound subordination; Spirit-baptism = new covenant fulfillment
9–11	Jesus baptized by John; heavens torn open; Spirit descends; Father speaks	“Torn” (σχιζω) echoes 15:38 (temple veil torn) — an inclusio of divine breakthrough
12–13	Spirit drives Jesus into	Two verses only — Mark’s

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
	wilderness; forty days; tempted by Satan; angels minister	compression signals announcement, not instruction
14–15	John arrested; Jesus enters Galilee proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom	Arrest as trigger; “fulfilled / at hand / repent / believe” = full kingdom summons
16–18	Call of Simon and Andrew: “Follow me, I will make you fishers of men” — they leave immediately	εὐθύς — no deliberation; demonstrates authority of the call
19–20	Call of James and John: leave father and boat — they follow immediately	Leaving Zebedee and hired servants = total break; economic cost made explicit
21–22	Synagogue teaching at Capernaum: crowd astonished — “not as the scribes”	Scribal authority was derivative (citation-based); Jesus’ authority was intrinsic
23–26	Unclean spirit confronted — “I know who you are, the Holy One of God”; Jesus silences and casts out	Demon has superior theological knowledge but zero claim on Jesus; authority is uncontested
27–28	Crowd’s response: “What is this? New teaching with authority!” — fame spreads	The question the whole chapter raises; this is Mark’s designed response in the reader
29–31	Peter’s mother-in-law healed of fever; she immediately serves	Private miracle follows public; healing is immediate and complete; service is the response
32–34	Whole city gathers at evening; many healed; demons silenced (they know Him)	Evening = Sabbath ends (Sabbath = v. 21); scale of response; demons forbidden to speak identity
35–38	Jesus rises before dawn to pray; disciples find Him; He insists on moving to other towns	Prayer in solitude despite massive “success”; the mission is proclamation, not accumulation
39	Preaches throughout Galilee; casts out demons	Summary of itinerant ministry; word and power

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
40–42	Leper approaches; Jesus, “moved with compassion,” touches and cleanses him	together Touch is the scandal — touching a leper incurs uncleanness; Jesus is not infected, He infects with wholeness
43–45	Jesus charges silence; priest inspection commanded; leper spreads news; Jesus can no longer enter cities	Disobedience to the charge — irony: Jesus is now in the “outside” the leper formerly occupied

Divisions Table

Division	Verses	Label
1	1:1	The Title: The Gospel of the Son of God
2	1:2–8	The Forerunner: John Prepares the Way
3	1:9–11	The Confirmation: The Father Speaks, the Spirit Descends
4	1:12–13	The Confrontation: The Son Tested in the Wilderness
5	1:14–15	The Proclamation: The Kingdom Has Come — Repent and Believe
6	1:16–20	The Call: Immediate, Total, Effectual Following
7	1:21–28	The Authority: Teaching and Power Over the Unclean
8	1:29–34	The Compassion: Healing in the House and the Whole City
9	1:35–39	The Mission: Prayer, Movement, Proclamation
10	1:40–45	The Touch: The Untouchable Made Clean

Subject Sentence & Primary Claim (*restated*)

Subject Sentence: The Son of God arrives in power, identity confirmed, authority demonstrated, calling for total response.

Primary Claim: God is confronting every reader with the overwhelming, undeniable authority of Jesus Christ — the Son of God who commands creation, demons, disease, and disciples — so that no one can remain a neutral observer; the only options are to flee or to follow.

Applications (Five)

1. (Mind/Belief) — Reckon with who Jesus actually is, not who you have domesticated Him to be. The crowd in the synagogue was already religious — they attended synagogue, they knew the Torah, they had a category for teachers. What they encountered in Jesus shattered their categories. The common tendency is to fit Jesus into an already-existing framework — a moral example, a spiritual resource, a religious comfort — and to relate to Him within that framework. Mark 1 will not allow it. The exorcisms, the immediate command-and-obedience structure of the disciple calls, the Father's voice from heaven — these are not additions to a known category but the demolition of all insufficient categories. The first application of this passage is cognitive and theological: sit before the cumulative weight of this chapter and let it recalibrate who you actually believe Jesus to be.

2. (Affections/Worship) — Let the compassion of v. 41 move you past mere doctrinal acknowledgment into love. Jesus was “moved with compassion” — the Greek (*splanchnizomai*) refers to a visceral, gut-level upheaval — for a man who was untouchable, excluded, defined by his uncleanness. Jesus did not merely pronounce him clean from a distance; He reached out and touched him. The application here is not behavioral but affective: this is who your King is. He is not only powerful — He is moved by your condition. The One who commands demons with a word is the same One who touches the excluded with a hand. Allow this to produce not just admiration but deep, personal love for the One who was willing to be associated with your uncleanness. Worship flows here, not mere intellectual assent.

3. (Will/Behavior) — Identify what you have not yet left at the shore. Simon and Andrew left their nets. James and John left their father, their boat, their hired servants — the whole economic infrastructure of their life. The text does not moralize about this; it simply narrates it as the shape of following. The question pressed by vv. 16–20 is not abstract: what specific thing — relationship, financial arrangement, career trajectory, identity structure — are you still holding while claiming to follow? The passage does not demand poverty or family abandonment, but it does demand that nothing competes for the place Jesus claims. Name the net. Name the boat. Name the father still sitting in it.

4. (Mind/Belief) — Understand that the kingdom’s arrival means the enemy’s domain is already being dismantled. The demons in Mark 1 do not resist Jesus — they convulse and flee. They know exactly who He is and they have no claim on the territory of His presence. This is not a chapter about ongoing spiritual warfare in which the outcome is uncertain — it is a chapter about the arrival of the King whose presence means the enemy’s defeat is a settled matter. The application is epistemic: stop living as though the outcome of the conflict between Christ and evil is undecided. The one who has authority over the unclean spirits in Mark 1 is the same Lord before whom every knee will bow. Believe what the demons already know.

5. (Affections/Worship) — Let the rhythm of vv. 35–38 diagnose your own relationship to solitude, prayer, and mission. In the middle of an eruption of astonishing public “success” — the whole city at the door, healings and exorcisms multiplying — Jesus rises before dawn, withdraws to a desolate place, and prays. When the disciples find Him and report that “everyone is looking for you,” He does not return to capitalize on momentum. He moves on. The underlying reality being disclosed is this: Jesus’ identity and mission were not fed by public response; they were anchored in His relationship with the Father. The application is not merely “pray more” but a deeper diagnosis: are your sense of purpose, your spiritual energy, and your direction in life fed by visibility and response — or are they anchored in something that holds in the dark, before dawn, when no one is watching?

Theological Importance

Theological Importance: Mark 1 is the Gospel’s first and most concentrated statement of Christology — and it is Christology by demonstration rather than by proposition. Every section of the chapter contributes to a single theological reality: Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the Davidic Messiah, the eschatological King, and the LORD of Israel arriving in person. The opening title is confirmed by the Father’s voice, displayed by uncontested authority over unclean spirits and disease, enacted through effectual calling, and climaxed by the compassionate touch of the untouchable. What the OT prophets anticipated — the arrival of God to save, to reign, and to make all things new — is beginning to happen. This is not one impressive rabbi among others; this is the in-breaking of the kingdom of God in the person of its King. Mark’s theological claim could not be more compressed or more total: the gospel is not a set of ideas about Jesus; it is the announcement that Jesus *is* — and that His arrival changes everything.

Reformed Theological Significance

Reformed Theological Significance: Mark 1 is foundational to the Reformed understanding of the gospel as *euangelion* — not a moral program to be performed but a royal announcement to be received. The passage grounds the Reformation’s insistence

that salvation begins with God's sovereign initiative, not human decision or preparedness: Jesus calls, and they follow; Jesus speaks, and demons flee; the Father declares, and the Son's identity is confirmed. No one in this chapter earns or prepares their way into relationship with Jesus — even the disciples' "leaving everything" is the response to His call, not the condition for receiving it. The chapter also anchors the Reformed doctrine of Christus Victor within a broader framework: the exorcisms are not the gospel, but they are the gospel's advance troops — the King is here, the enemy's occupation is ending, the new creation is breaking in. Finally, the compression of the temptation account (vv. 12–13), read redemptive-historically, grounds the atonement in the identity of Jesus as the last Adam and true Israel — One who did not fail where humanity failed, and whose obedience is therefore the basis of our standing before God.

Main Takeaway

The Son of God has arrived — not quietly, not gradually, but with commanding, undeniable authority over every domain that enslaves and destroys human beings. He has already spoken to the demons, and they have fled. He has already reached out and touched the untouchable, and they have been made clean. He is now speaking to you — not with the derivative authority of a teacher citing someone else, but with the intrinsic authority of the One in whom all the fullness of God dwells. You are standing where the crowd in Capernaum stood, where the disciples on the shore stood, where the leper in the open field stood. The question Mark 1 will not let you escape is the same question they could not escape: *What will you do with this man?* There is no neutral ground. Drop the net.

Preaching/Teaching Pitfalls

- **Treating Mark 1 as a catalog of miracles rather than a unified Christological argument.** The ten divisions of the chapter are not ten independent episodes to be preached sequentially over ten weeks without a controlling claim. The chapter has a single thesis (v. 1) that every subsequent section supports. A preacher who moves through the miracles without keeping the cumulative Christological argument in view will produce wonder without worship and admiration without surrender. Every section must be read in light of the whole.
- **Moralizing the call of the disciples (vv. 16–20) before establishing who is doing the calling.** The most common homiletical error with the disciple-call narratives is to begin with "here is what radical discipleship looks like" before the congregation has been arrested by the identity of the One calling. The result is a sermon about commitment that functions like any other motivational address. The text first asks: *who is this, that they would leave everything immediately?* Establish that, and the call to follow carries its proper weight.

- **Under-reading the “immediately” (εὐθύς) pattern as merely a literary style.** Commentators sometimes note that *euthys* is “just a Markan characteristic” and move on. But the frequency and placement of the word in this chapter is itself a theological statement about the kind of authority Jesus exercises — it encounters no friction, no deliberation, no negotiation. Preaching that acknowledges this pattern only as a narrative device misses the theological thunder it is meant to produce in the listener.
- **Preaching the temptation (vv. 12–13) as a moral example rather than a cosmic credential.** “Jesus resisted temptation, and so can you” is a technically true statement that is nonetheless a homiletical category error for this passage. Mark does not narrate the content of the temptations or Jesus’ responses — he announces the confrontation and the outcome. The passage is a credential, not a curriculum. Preachers who moralize it rob the congregation of the Christological confidence the text is designed to produce.
- **Allowing the healing narratives to become a prosperity or healing-expectation framework.** The healings in Mark 1 are demonstrations of the kingdom’s arrival — signs that the new creation is breaking in under the authority of the King. They are not a template for what all believers should expect in every circumstance, nor are they primarily invitations to “claim your healing.” Preaching them without this Christological and eschatological frame produces a consumer theology of miracle-expectation rather than the proper response of awe before the King.
- **Leaving the leper pericope (vv. 40–45) disconnected from the chapter’s controlling claim.** The leper’s healing is often preached as a stand-alone illustration of Jesus’ compassion — which it certainly displays — without connecting the scandal of the touch to the chapter’s central claim. Jesus touching the leper reverses the direction of contamination that the entire Levitical system assumed: uncleanness spreads outward, not inward toward the holy. Jesus does not become unclean — He makes clean. This is not merely compassion; it is the Christological claim of the chapter enacted in miniature. Miss that, and the passage becomes a heartwarming anecdote rather than a declaration of who this King is.