The Stock Markets, Money and the Bible

The headline was striking, the figures mind-numbing. How many of us can relate to $1.5 trillion? But that's what the headline declared: "'THEY BROKE THE DEAL.' Donald Trump wiped nearly $1.5 TRILLION off global markets in a single tweet after threatening to double China trade tariffs."

How much is $1.5 trillion?

In 2015, Buzzfeed posted an illustrative video which depicts $1 trillion in graphic terms. As explained by Cameron Koch in the *Tech Times*, "Just seeing the scale of it all is sobering, as the $100 million stacks made up of $100 bills continues to grow and grow, until the cartoon man used for scale can barely be seen amidst the piles of money.

"But if you think that's insane, the idea that lining up a trillion $1 bills end-to-end could reach the sun puts just how much money we are talking about in perspective. That's 96,906,565 miles worth of dollar bills."

That's a lot of money, no matter you stack it, spread it or count it.

To put this in the context of a wage earner, let's say you make $60,000 per year, and you work for 50 straight years. That would amount to a total of $3 million, a fairly sizable sum. Now, do that again and again and again—to be exact, do that *half-a-million times*—and you get to $1.5 trillion.

Yet, according to financial experts, President Trump wiped that off global markets with a single tweet.

Talk about the fleeing nature of money. Talk about the fluctuations of the market. Talk about highs and lows.

Trump’s two-part tweet, consisting of 102 words, said this: “For 10 months, China has been paying tariffs to the USA of 25% on 50 billion dollars of high tech, and 10% on 200 billion dollars of other goods. These payments are partially responsible for our great economic results. The 10% will go up to 25% on Friday. 325 billions dollars of additional goods sent to us by China remain untaxed, but will be shortly, at a rate of 25%.

“The tariffs paid to the USA have had little impact on product cost, mostly borne by China. The trade deal with China continues, but too slowly, as they attempt to renegotiate. No!”

What were the effects of his words? According to *The Sun*, “Analysts have now pointed out that the president’s message cost the markets more than $13bn for each of the 102 words in the tweet.”

Talk about presidential power. Talk about getting a bang for your buck—or more accurately, a lot of bucks for your bang.

In fact, breaking this down by the letters used in the tweet (roughly 450), $1.5 trillion would amount to $3,333,333, *per letter*. In sum, “A fortune has already been erased from global stocks so far this week, reports .”

What does all this have to do with the Bible?

Simply that the Scriptures frequently warn about the fleeting nature of wealth.

Jesus referred to it as “the deceitfulness of riches” (see Mark 4:19) meaning, at least, that: 1) riches can deceive by giving a false sense of security; and 2) riches can deceive with a false promise of satisfaction. The reality is that, “He who loves money will not be satisfied with money; nor he who loves abundance with increase” (Eccl. 5:10a).

That’s why Paul spoke about “the uncertainty of riches” (1 Tim. 6:17, NASB)—and he wrote this long before Donald Trump ever used Twitter and long before there was such a thing as a stock market. Riches have always been uncertain.

But the best biblical illustration for the fleeting nature of money comes from the book of Proverbs, famous for its pithy, quotable wisdom.

As rendered vividly in the NLT, “Don’t wear yourself out trying to get rich. Be wise enough to know when to quit. In the blink of an eye wealth disappears, for it will sprout wings and fly away like an eagle” (Prov. 23:4-5).

This week, if analysts are correct, $1.5 trillion sprouted wings and flew away. Goodbye!

Of course, if Trump’s instincts are correct, this massive loss will rebound with even more massive gains.

But either way, the lesson is sure: Don’t put your trust in the financial markets. Don’t put your trust in money. Don’t put your trust in wealth.

You can be a billionaire today and a pauper tomorrow. And even as a billionaire, you can be depressed, suicidal and empty.

That’s why Proverbs, which is, in fact, filled with shrewd business advice, also says this: “Better to have little, with fear for the Lord, than to have great treasure and inner turmoil. A bowl of vegetables with someone you love is better than steak with someone you hate. … Better a dry crust eaten in peace than a house filled with feasting—and conflict” (Prov. 15:16-18; 17:1).

The fact is that a massive amount of money—really, an almost incomprehensible amount—can disappear in a moment of time. (To be precise, in the time it takes to compose 102 words and post two tweets.)

But inner satisfaction, family wholeness and a sense of destiny and purpose are not quickly obtained—and not easily lost.

For Dr. Brown’s latest commentaries, listen to the podcasts below.